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SIGHT & SOUND

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'Memoirs of a
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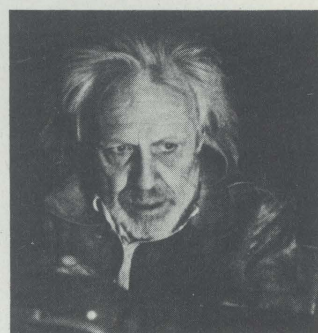
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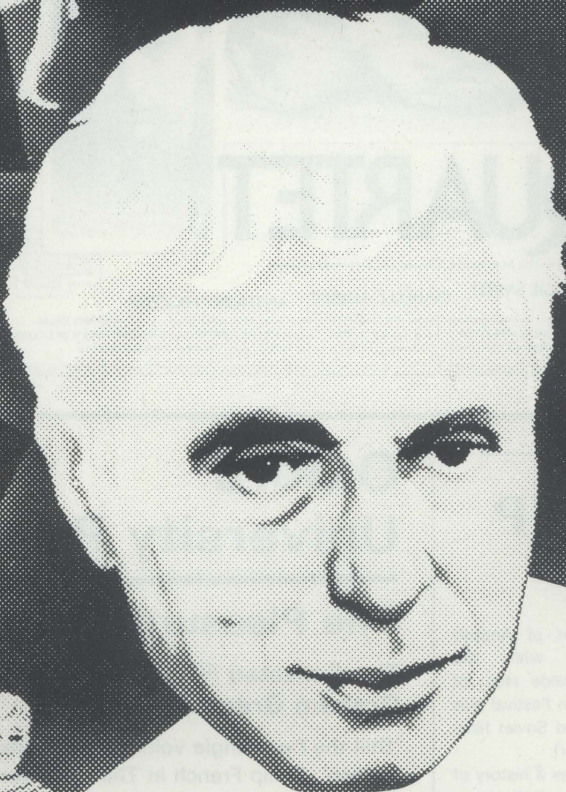
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FILM CENSORSHIP WORLDWIDE

Index on Censorship 4/81 — a special issue on film censorship.

South Africa: Keyan Tomaselli on the South African cinema, Molefe Pheto on black South African film-makers in exile and Lindy Wilson on her experiences making *Crossroads*.

Egypt: A profile of Yousef Chahine.

Senegal: An extract from the script of Sembene Ousmane's banned film *Ceddo*.

Latin America: The problems of film-makers by the Uruguayan critic Homero Alsina Thevenet.

Argentina: An interview with Fernando Solanas and extracts from articles on the cinema from the Argentine national daily *La Prensa*. Also a profile of Jorge Cedron who committed suicide in Paris last year.

Bolivia: Alfonso Gumucio Dagron lists the dangers facing film-makers.

Eastern Europe: A. J. Liehm describes the vagaries of film censorship in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Rumania.

USSR: An account of Anatoly Kuznetsov's battle with the authorities, and an inside story of the 1978 Moscow Film Festival plus a list of 50 suppressed Soviet films (giving title and director).

UK: Guy Phelps gives a history of British film censorship and discusses present problems.

USA: Alan Stanbrook explores the constrictive effects of the production and distribution companies.

France: The Commission de Controle Cinematographique exists officially to guard morals but Martyn Auty shows how it exercises political control.

Pakistan: An interview with Jamil Dehlavi whose film *The Blood of Hussain* was smuggled out of Pakistan.

India: Prabhu S. Guptara writes about the erratic application of the censorship rules in the Indian cinema.

China: Isabel Hilton describes how the swings in Chinese cultural policy since 1949 have affected the Chinese cinema.

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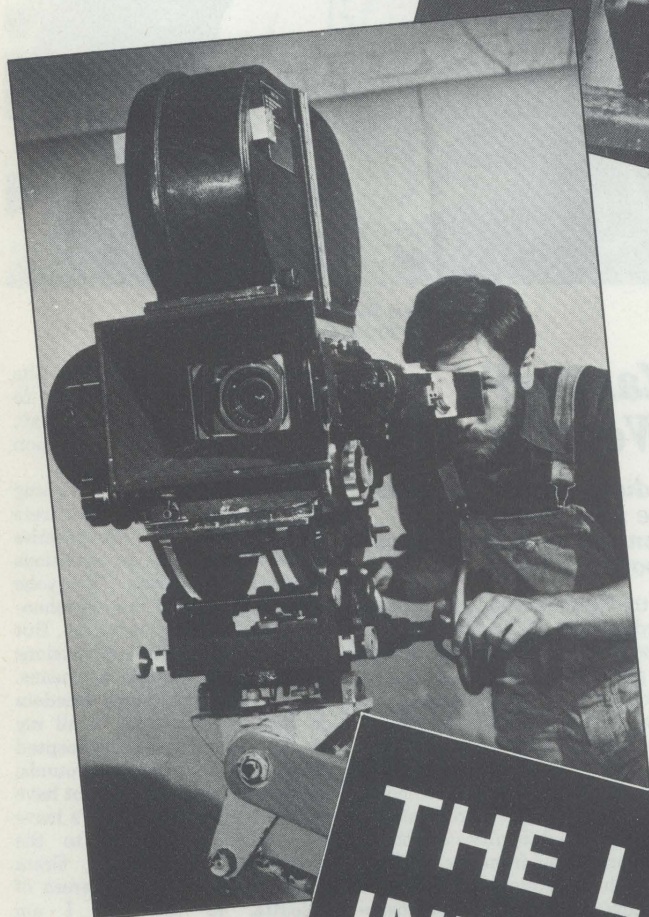
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Interim Inaction

Film-makers urge government action at a time when 'all signs indicate the production of a mere handful of British feature films in the coming year'

Back in 1975, Harold Wilson (not yet Sir Harold) set up the Prime Minister's Working Party under the chairmanship of John Terry (not yet Sir John), to look into the British film industry's problems. There was a feeling that the Prime Minister, whose own special interest in film affairs dated from his time at the Board of Trade in the late 1940s, was about to ride to the rescue of British movies. The Terry Committee reported swiftly and constructively. It recommended increased financial support; and it recommended the setting up of a British Film Authority, a statutory body to take over many of the duties at present divided among different organisations and government departments.

The then Prime Minister announced that 'suitable proposals would be introduced as soon as possible.' More than five years later, there is of course no British Film Authority in existence, and none on the horizon. The Callaghan government, moved by no sense of urgency, followed the classic holding device of appointing a further committee. The Interim Action Committee (ironic title), chaired by Sir Harold Wilson himself, is still in existence and still issuing reports. Several years ago, it produced a plan for the proposed Authority, which was criticised in some quarters for its flavour of bureaucracy, of committees talking to committees.

If the Callaghan government failed to set up the Authority, the Thatcher government is even less likely to do so, except under the heaviest pressure. It would be a more tidy way of organising affairs, but it would almost certainly result in further calls on public money. Recently, pressure has been applied, in the again classic form of a letter to *The Times* (10 April). The 21 signatories, who in no uncertain terms expressed their 'desperate concern' at the plight of British cinema, ranged from the Boulting brothers to Kenneth Trodd, by way of Bryan Forbes, Jack Gold, Laurence Olivier, Harold Pinter, Nicolas Roeg, John Schlesinger. Curiously, they did not refer to the Authority as such. The letter advocates 'the establishment within a single ministry of a new statutory body' to be 'the principal adviser to the government on all matters relating to the audiovisual entertainment industry.' One would deduce that the 21, possibly not too enthusiastic

about the Authority in the form proposed by the IAC, preferred to write as though they were suggesting something new.

The other main point in *The Times* letter was that the Eady levy provisions should apply to films shown on television. 'The ludicrous situation of the present largest exhibitor of films being exempt from such payments must be changed. ITV last year showed 328 films made originally for the cinema... The justice of television companies contributing to the fund could not be more self-evident.' This, again, is hardly a new suggestion.

Meanwhile, the IAC at the end of April issued its fourth report, urging closer co-operation between the film and television industries and suggesting tidying up some of the obstacles in the way. It recommends, for instance, that films should be eligible for payments from the British Film Fund, even if there is an agreement at the date of registration that they are to be shown on television, and that the independent television companies should be encouraged to invest in film production by an amendment to the Independent Broadcasting Authority Act which would allow them to count such spending against the excess profits levy. (Another suggestion, incidentally, from the Terry Report.)

The Association of Independent Producers, forceful and by now veteran campaigners, reacted sternly and swiftly, regretting that the IAC report 'does not tackle certain crucial questions.' Their press statement goes on: 'In every country where film-TV co-operation has been effective in bringing about the production of successful indigenous films, it has been because the decision-making process has been substantially removed from the TV companies... How is it to be expected that finance from the excess profits levy and the BBC pre-production fund would stimulate the production of cinema films?'

In a sturdy editorial on 2 May 1981, *Screen International* accused the film industry of 'years of greed, self-interest, restrictive practice and sheer complacency' and the government of 'stunning disregard for the enormous potential of a healthy British film industry.' Once again, there is a call from *The Times* letter writers, the AIP, etc., for 'all industry discussions'. But discussion is one thing the industry has not been short of throughout the last five years. Sooner or later, the government must make up its mind on the many proposals, including the belief of many people, if not the civil servants, that British cinema would be more effectively served by a single authority than by the present split between 'Arts' and 'Industry'. It would be better if it were sooner.

PENELOPE HOUSTON



The New Zealand actor Sam Neill in 'From a Far Country'.

Zanussi's Wojtyla

'I didn't choose the idea; the idea chose me,' Zanussi says of his film about the Pope

In the Sistine Chapel, the Vatican gardens and St Peter's Basilica, Krzysztof Zanussi and his director of photography Slawomir Idziak were, in early 1981, shooting the final scenes of *From a Far Country*, based on the life of Karol Wojtyla, Pope John Paul II. They were working to a tight schedule and under strict regulations, owing to the difficulties of obtaining permission from the Vatican, after shooting most of the film in Cracow. After two years of negotiations with the Vatican and the Polish government, the film, originally a co-production between Film Polski and RAI, the Italian television network, has burgeoned into a multinational project with a \$6 million budget.

The originator of the project is Giacomo Pezzali, who put up 55 per cent of the budget through Transworld Film. Pezzali put the idea forward in 1978 with the Italian playwright Diego Fabbri (author of *The Trial of Jesus*), whose involvement as screenwriter helped to obtain the Vatican's imprimatur. After Zeffirelli was suggested and rejected as a possible director, Zanussi, who like Wojtyla is multi-lingual, and fluent in Italian as a result of his Friulian ancestry, was approached and began work on the screenplay with Fabbri. But Fabbri died before a script was completed, and the Marxist writer Szczepanski took over. Meanwhile, Lord Grade offered to take a large stake in the project and obtained 35 per cent participation, the remaining

10 per cent going to RAI. Now the budget has been underwritten to the tune of \$5 million by NBC, who have obtained television rights for a 2½ hour version.

Speculation has been running high among Italian observers about the degree of compromise called for by such an ambitious commercial venture. 'Everyone keeps asking me if I'm apprehensive,' Zanussi said, 'and I am. But only in relation to the dimensions of the production and its means. I've probably had more freedom on this occasion than in all my previous experience. I accepted the project on patriotic grounds; if I hadn't, it would no doubt have gone to an American. Let's leave the ridiculous projects to the Americans, like asking Greta Garbo to play Mother Teresa of Calcutta. In the film I am attempting to explain the special characteristics of Polish Catholicism. What is difficult is having to deal with an unknown audience, trying to relate elements of our mentality to foreigners, and having to make concessions in order to be understood.'

Zanussi has not tried to make a biography of the Pope, but to flesh out the social context of Polish Catholicism and its dual struggle with Nazism and Stalinism. 'After a lot of doubts and hesitation, I agreed to make a film based around the Pope rather than on the Pope. I didn't choose the idea; the idea chose me. I'm concerned with showing the environment and the life of the Pope's generation, the historical background of the culture I belong to. It's a committed film; I don't remain neutral or indifferent. I see quite an obvious logic in Wojtyla's attitudes, as do most Polish people. The link between a certain national pride and the Church is for us an internal one, whereas in Italy, for example, the

whole process of national unity was carried out against the Church. In Poland, the Church has been the symbol of the nation when the nation was divided by three invaders. That's the background of the relation with Marxism. The co-existence of two value systems and two ways of thinking is very dramatic and rich, and it's also the drama of our generation. This is possibly the first time that I've found a subject where I can express, in a simplified way but directly, elements of this conflict which manifested themselves under Stalinism.'

The film has been shot in English, which caused some difficulty to the seven-year-old who plays Wojtyla as a child. It opens with a sequence resonant with religious parallel and theatricality. The six-year-old Wojtyla is with his father at a Passion Play during Holy Week in the 1920s, and afterwards he gets lost in the crowd of pilgrims participating in the Stations of the Cross in a small town near Cracow. The child is eventually found in a tavern, where he is fascinated by the sight of the actor who had played Christ, still in costume, drinking beer. Zanussi has stated that the model for his film is Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev*. 'The characters' destinies are intertwined with the life of this priest (Cezary Moranski) who becomes a cardinal and then Pope, but who is seldom seen and then only from a distance. This prevents any hagiography and also any involvement with the private life of the Pope, which I do not think can be the subject of a film.'

It remains to be seen if Zanussi has circumvented the pitfalls inherent in such a project. In its collective focus it might seem interestingly to belie a statement he made in 1979 about his position in Polish cinema: 'The previous generation of film-makers, including Wajda, always dealt with collectivity, in terms of the nation and generations, whereas I am much more interested in discovering the margin of individual choice. Not that I believe in individualism, but I don't want to be determined by collectivity.'

TONY MITCHELL

Berlin

Incidental excitements at a disappointing festival

It was ironically appropriate, given the almost total lack of interesting product in the Competition, the Festival's prestige event, that the most important film to be seen at Berlin this year should have been buried in a single, virtually unpublicised screening in the market section.

Dennis Hopper's *Out of the Blue* surfaced at Cannes last year, but has since been effectively suppressed by its Canadian pro-

ducers. Certainly, the Canadian market stand was conspicuously devoid of any reference to it. Taking its title from a Neil Young song, the film constitutes the dark underside to the humanist family dramas (*Ordinary People*, *Tribute*) prominently on show elsewhere. After serving a jail sentence for driving his truck through a crowded school bus, the leading character (Hopper) returns to find his teenage daughter subsuming her identity in an obsession with the kindred spirits of Elvis Presley and Johnny Rotten. Gradually she emerges as the 'disturbed', ultimately murderous embodiment of the hopeless alienation afflicting Hopper, and by extension his generation, in terms of community (dealing with the parents of the children he slaughtered), work (bulldozing garbage on a tip) and marriage (his drug-addicted wife sleeps with his best friend). The film is graced with brilliant performances, particularly from Linda Manz as the daughter, and observed through a combination of long takes and seemingly constant camera movement. Its charting of the decline of the family is wholly compulsive.

The intelligence Hopper brings to bear on the 'punk phenomenon' was all the more apparent after Peter Fratscher's *Asphalt-nacht*, shown in the New German Films section. Here, a young punk inspires an older rock musician, obsessed with the spirit of '68 and bearing a significant (?) resemblance to Wim Wenders, to complete the *meisterwerk* on which he has laboured for years. The night shooting in Berlin is imaginative enough, but the film's attitude to its artist and his bombastic song (full of embarrassing references to 'the kids of 1984') is hopelessly indulgent. Reinhard Hauff's *Endstation Freiheit* similarly lacks any useful perspective on its protagonist, a criminal turned writer who becomes a media celebrity as his partner is gunned down while carrying out the crime they planned together. Burkhard Driest's macho torments, including coping with the twin 'problems' of homosexuals and women, lead nowhere except to the weary irony of the film's climax. Other movies viewed in this section, including Robert van Ackeren's *Die Reinheit des Herzens* (a satire on the gap between theory and practice in the sexual politics espoused by liberal left intellectuals) and Bernhard Sinkel's *Kaltgestellt* (a thriller about a teacher falling victim to oppressive anti-terrorist measures), were efficient enough but seemed to suggest things merely ticking over.

By contrast, the one-off South East Asian Panorama seemed for the most part positively inspired. Chatree C. Yukol's *Citizen* (Thailand) is a noticeably uncompromising and unsentimental variation on *Bicycle Thieves*, in

which a young taxi-driver (and single parent) has his vehicle stolen and falls foul of gangsters and insurmountable civic corruption in attempting to recover it. At the other end of the spectrum, Kidlat Tahimik's *Who Invented the Yo-Yo? Who Invented the Moon Buggy?* (Philippines) traces the efforts of its director, aided by a group of children, to become the first man to play the yo-yo on the moon, a project, unfortunately, where cuteness finally wins out over quirkiness.

For pure, formalist pleasure, nothing in the Festival approached Patrick Tam's *The Sword* (Hong Kong), which contains swordfight set pieces composed and edited with exhilarating speed and precision. And Ann Hui's *The Spooky Bunch* (Hong Kong) was a definite improvement on her pinch from *Don't Look Now*, *The Secret*, which was shown at last year's Edinburgh and London festivals. The plot concerns a theatrical troupe plagued by a mischievously vengeful spirit, and the theatre bustle is busily controlled. A too broad sense of humour, however, remains a problem. The most remarkable film in the event was Tsui Hark's *Dangerous Encounters—First Kind* (Hong Kong), apparently Hark's angry attempt, following the commercial failure of *The Butterfly Murders*, to give the Hong Kong film industry the product it wanted. The result is a comic-strip catalogue of sadistic violence, centred on American Vietnam vets dealing arms in Hong Kong. The manic conception of character precludes any 'safe' perspective on events for the hapless spectator, who is in the equivalent position to the film's only survivor, wandering off into a graveyard, with his insane

laughter matching the sound of his gun being fired at the sky.

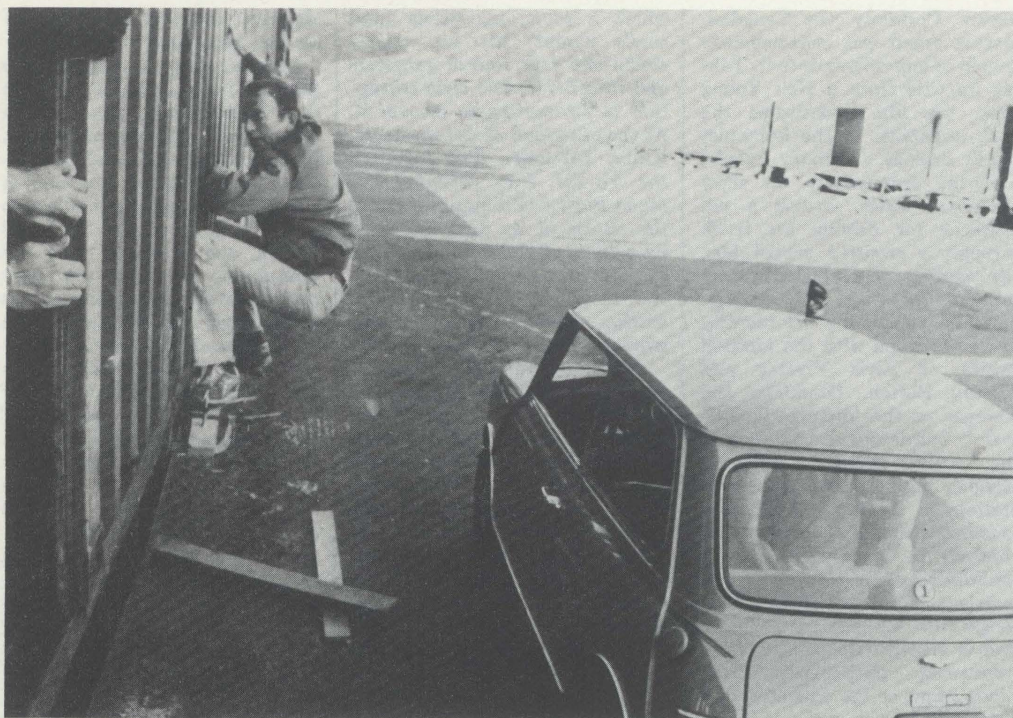
One soon came to long for some spark of imagination or excess in the Competition. Apart from Mrinal Sen's *Anatomy of Famine*, which explores the social and cultural contradictions surrounding a crew visiting a Bengali village to make a film about the 1943 famine, and of which more will presumably be heard, the event was massively uninspiring. It was perhaps typified by the Russian entry, Alexander Sarchi's *26 Days in the Life of Dostoyevsky*, which deals with the troubled birth of *The Gambler*. The process of artistic creation is baldly reduced to gazing out of frame with furrowed brows. The Chinese *Come Back Swallow*, directed by Fu Jingong, filters its concern about the past over-harsh treatment of so-called rightist elements through an unironically viewed Ross Hunter style weepie plot, in which the sins of the parents return to haunt their children.

But the people who greeted this effort with derisive laughter were presumably those who applauded Claude Goretta's *La Provinciale*, a disturbingly soft-centred confection with Nathalie Baye as the country girl who learns the difficulties of coping in the big city. After a time, the film's 'point' seems to be the fetishisation through close-up of Baye's face, alternately and interminably beaming and soulful. This is disguised behind a narrative in which every situation becomes an excuse for a meaningless and sentimental assertion of 'dignity' and 'independence'. When prostitution (high class, of course) becomes grist to this mill, some kind of nadir is reached.

STEVE JENKINS



Reinhard Hauff's *'Endstation Freiheit'*.



'Goodbye Pork Pie'.

Goodbye Pork Pie

A New Zealand film about a car chase may herald a breakthrough for the local industry

On the surface, there would seem to be reason for optimism within the rapidly developing New Zealand film industry. At least ten features are at various stages of production; and one film recently released, *Goodbye Pork Pie*, is reported to have grossed one million US dollars in the home market alone, with sales already made to several countries. The fear of many film-makers, however, is that foreign companies are becoming involved in the industry, importing money and stars and making films which use the New Zealand landscape but are often set elsewhere. Examples are the forthcoming science fiction feature *The Dawn of Time* and the Australian producer Tony Ginnane's *The Race to the Yankee Zephyr*, which was moved to New Zealand when Australia's Equity objected to the use of several foreign actors, including George Peppard and Donald Pleasence. Now Ginnane is preparing to film *Shadow Land*, a horror drama ostensibly set in an American university town.

The foreign companies are accused of taking advantage of tax concessions to the film industry and of New Zealand's lower wage structure. 'Hundreds of us have worked away and lived on nothing only to see these people arrive,' complains local producer John Maynard. 'What I'm against, quite simply, is New Zealanders financing other

people's junk.' Other film-makers draw parallels with the fate of the British industry, predicting that Australian and American companies will use local technicians and locations and stifle the growth of indigenous cinema by cornering what finance is available.

It has not been easy to establish a viable industry in a nation of three million people. Since World War Two a handful of people have struggled to make local features, against a shortage of money, lack of interest from distributors, shortage of equipment and the non-existence of a film community. A breakthrough came in 1977, when four features were released to varying degrees of audience enthusiasm. None of them made a profit. Two of the films, *Wildman*, about a travelling showman in the gold rush days, and *Dagg Day Afternoon*, a comedy built around a New Zealand TV star, were made by Geoff Murphy as a double feature for less than \$100,000. Murphy built up a closely knit group of actors and technicians, making low-budget short features and existing on occasional assignments from television and commercials.

The years of determination and self-denial have now brought forth *Goodbye Pork Pie*, a local road film which in New Zealand cinemas has grossed the kind of sums usually associated with the likes of *Jaws* and *Star Wars*. The film is an engaging tale of a youth who uses a stolen driving licence to hire a car, picks up a couple of young hitch-hikers, and becomes involved in a police chase which runs the length of the country. Murphy made it for a reported \$400,000, which seems amazing in view of all the cars which got wrecked in the process. It is skill-

fully aimed at local audiences, with lashings of New Zealand's justly famous scenery and scenes shot in most of the major cities. The fugitives enter Wellington, a city whose weather is a national joke, in pouring rain; and the sequence brings audience applause everywhere.

Goodbye Pork Pie is sometimes awkward but it is also clever and funny, and Murphy has broken out of the self-consciousness which has so plagued New Zealand film (and television). His film already looks like a landmark in the development of the industry. Other promising projects include *Scarecrow*, a macabre murder story set in a small town and adapted from a novel by the long neglected writer Ronald Hugh Morrieson. There is also in preparation a film based on the life of Katherine Mansfield.

The film which is attracting most attention is *Bad Blood*, the true story of a South Island farmer who, in 1941, turned his rifle on the residents of a tiny village and killed seven people, including five policemen. The producer is the former New Zealander Andrew Brown, who grew up not far from the scene of the murders. He now works in London, and was producer of the TV series *Rock Follies* and *Edward and Mrs Simpson*. *Bad Blood* has about \$1.5 million in British money invested in it, and two Australian stars, but because of the heavy involvement of local actors and technicians, and the fact that the story is a part of the country's history, it is intrinsically a New Zealand film.

Critics of the present situation can thus make a distinction between styles of foreign involvement, the deciding factor really being whether the subject is a

local one. It would of course be difficult to object to foreign investment, given the problems of finding finance and the fact that the New Zealand Film Commission has only \$500,000 a year to invest, and must spread this sum over other things as well as feature films. The Commission tries to assist people wanting to make documentaries or plays for television, and in many ways the economics of these projects are less encouraging than for more expensive feature films. A documentary producer knows that he has only one local market—the state-run television network. The fees paid by Television New Zealand are inevitably far below the cost of making even a reasonably modest documentary, and there are many independent film-makers who have been lectured by television executives about how many episodes of US situation comedies can be purchased for the price of one local documentary.

Nevertheless, after all those decades of dreaming and hoping, a local and it seems viable industry is evolving. On top of that, the record of *Goodbye Pork Pie* has shown that New Zealand films can compete with imports, and go very close to making a profit on home ground.

ROBIN BROMBY

Tarkovsky's Translations

Interviewed in London, Tarkovsky says his film images 'mean nothing more than they are'

Thanks to the tugging of some obscure strings, Andrei Tarkovsky popped up in London just as *Stalker* began its run at the Academy earlier this year. He was known, of course, to have visited Italy and France during the past decade, but he had begun to seem one of those Russians the West would seldom be allowed to meet, a status that does wonders for the reputation. Now here he was, abruptly in our midst for his first London visit, and the word got around fast. In a handful of days they fed him a conveyor belt of journalists and disciples, and at brief notice the NPT was wall-to-wall packed for his appearance.

Joining the queue as one who had theorised at some length about him while distributing *Solaris*, I was able in conspiracy with Charles and Kitty Cooper of Contemporary Films to sneak him off for a meal. Small and bristling, casual in no-nonsense blue denims, he moved in jerks as if some impatient editor kept clipping out frames from his personal time sequence. With considerable eloquence on his own part and that of the two official interpreters, he demonstrated an inclination to say as little as possible

TARKOVSKY

about anything specific; and, while it was evident that he recognised some English here and there, any direct conversation was out.

A few points of fact nevertheless brought down some myths. No, *Solaris* was not cut for release outside Russia; what you see, lacunae and all, is at 2 hours and 48 minutes precisely what he intended. No, he had nothing whatever to do with *First Teacher*, which he is usually credited as having written with Mikhailov-Konchalovsky alongside their collaboration on *Rublev*. No, *Mirror* was in no way suppressed by the authorities—on the contrary, they opened the Moscow cinema earlier in the day during its first run (7.00 a.m., at which hour it must have been something of a mixed blessing), to meet the public demand for extra screenings.

Another surprise was the revelation that because of a laboratory processing error, much of *Stalker* had been shot twice. 'Frustrating, yes, but it's a much better film as a result. Things changed the second time around—a woman can never give birth to the same child twice—but I'm more satisfied with the final product than I am with any of my other films.' Did the processing error account for the intermingling of colour and monochrome? 'No, that was all intentional. I love black and white cinema; I feel as if I discovered it. Audiences are supposed to prefer colour films, but I believe that colour is much less realistic than black and white. We don't normally notice colour, except in the cinema where it's somehow exaggerated. So the most "real" images on film are in monochrome.' Did this mean that the Zone in *Stalker*, which is (mostly) in colour by contrast with the drab world outside, is intended to be unreal? 'The Zone is a diseased area, abandoned; certainly there's an unreality about it. The use of colour could well mean it's unreal, but I don't know for sure.'

Which brought us bang up against the much argued problem of what, in Tarkovsky's films, one can know for sure. On this subject, he switched into overdrive (his NFT audience got the same treatment) while both interpreters at once struggled to keep up with the pace. 'Everybody asks me what things mean in my films. This is terrible! An artist doesn't have to answer for his meanings. I don't think so deeply about my work—I don't know what my symbols may represent. What matters to me is that they arouse feelings, any feelings you like, based on whatever your inner response might be. If you look for a meaning, you'll miss everything that happens. Thinking during a film interferes with your experience of it. Take a watch to pieces, it doesn't work. Similarly with a work of art, there's no way it can

be analysed without destroying it.'

Wouldn't he concede that in the autobiographical aspects of *Mirror* there may be incidents and images which meant more to Tarkovsky than to anyone else? He admitted, with regret, that the film had lost him a lot of friends. 'It was rather silly; they reproached me for being too personal in telling my own story. But if I show things that I didn't understand when they happened, how can I explain them now? People are intent on finding something in my work that I've "concealed", but it would be strange to make a film and hide one's thoughts. My images mean nothing more than they are.' But surely, I persisted, he had a purpose in mind when arranging, for example, that a bird should land on a boy's head in *Mirror*? And after some exasperation and sighing from the interpreters, purpose there proved to have been. 'My wife,' he said, 'attracts birds. When we walk in the forest, birds fly close to her—she is like them, a part of nature. Some country people even call her a sorceress. Now, I know there is no malice in her at all, birds will never approach an evil being. In the film, the child has just misbehaved, so to show the audience he isn't some kind of delinquent, beyond hope, I illustrate with the bird a hint of his true nature.'

As an explanation, it was not without impact. And with breakthrough achieved, Tarkovsky began to produce meanings quite readily. Some were more plausible than others. The final sequence of *Solaris*? 'Kris, the astronaut, has been recreated by the Ocean—the materialisation of his homesickness has been taken from him and reconstructed on the planet.' The wife/mother in *Mirror* floating in midair above the bed? 'Neither nightmare nor symbol; a sense of floating is what we all feel when all our support has gone.' (And no, he was not going to tell me how he achieved the shot, other than that it was extremely simple to do.) The seemingly telekinetic ability of the child in *Stalker*? 'We don't know ourselves all that well; sometimes we manifest forces that can't be measured by normal standards. I expect something like that,' he added thoughtfully, 'to happen at any time.'

Perhaps, after all, Tarkovsky's images were best left ambiguous. At the NFT, refusing to be interrupted in mid-flow for the obligatory film extracts, he had the last word: 'We've forgotten to relate emotionally to art—we treat it like editors, when everything's really very simple. Children have that simplicity and they understand my films very well. I haven't met a single serious critic who stands knee-high to those children when it comes to accepting my films for what they are.'

PHILIP STRICK

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REGIONAL

A mere £400,000 a year is currently spent on regional film-making in England and Wales. Nevertheless, in the past 18 months, 50 regional films were completed and some 100 went into production. Chris Auty surveys the output and details the sometimes rancorous history of this vital but closed-off area of British film-making—soon, perhaps, to be boosted and changed by the needs of the Fourth Channel.

Regional film production has been, is and will continue to be a 'hot potato'. British feelings about cultural relations between London and the provinces have in any case always been complex; by comparison, say, with Germany or Italy, the arts in Britain and their funding are now heavily centralised; and the recent attack by central government on arts (and other) subsidy has had far-reaching and divisive consequences. Apart from this general context, our film culture has been more or less openly in crisis for the past five years, and the effects of this uncertainty are nowhere more visible than in the rather young programme of regional film funding—a programme now just over a decade old. Arguments of film theory and practice, over definitions of independence and over the relations between film and television, have generated a volume of paperwork that puts the efforts of sixteenth century theology to shame. Regional celluloid is buried under snowdrifts of bureaucratic and critical confetti, and shredded between the grasp of half a dozen powerful bodies in the funding arena.*

The strictly financial background is, in any case, bleak. On the national level, it's worth remembering that the entire British Film Institute receives less annual funding than the Royal Opera House; and that British independent film production can expect less than a £2m annual subsidy from all sources. Despite ten years of regional film activity (and leaving Scotland out of account†), Britain boasts less than twenty sites where even marginally adequate 16mm equipment operates; only six sites have full

16mm and 8mm facilities; only two a complete range of non-professional film and video gauges.

Lumping together all sources of subsidy for film (whether production, administration, or educational) still gives a figure of only about £10m a year—about 12 per cent of the Arts Council's annual budget. This cultural reluctance to support film-making and film education reaches absurd extremes in some regions: in the 1979/80 financial year the Welsh Arts Council spent under 2 per cent of its total allocations on film. And the lack of comprehensive subsidy in this area is equalled only by the stubborn, even pig-headed scorn which film-makers and bureaucrats alike display for the notion of professional arts administration as it is preached in the rest of the EEC. In these conditions, it is surprising that film production in the regions continues at all, given that its funding amounts to only about £400,000 a year. But it does. The last eighteen months have seen over 50 films completed, and up to 100 have gone into production. Just as importantly, support continues for regional film archives; for local film societies; and for a limited number of day schools aimed at those in education—both pupils and teachers.

Major problems, however, remain. The BFI has presented a £40,000 sum for funding new work in the regions. Barrie Ellis-Jones (Head of BFI Regional Projects): 'It's geared to group work, but with a definite view to production results as well. It's there to grab Jeremy Isaacs and set up something that Channel 4 can align with.' But it seems that this regional fund will be centrally administered. Channel 4 has indeed been tempted into the area, announcing last autumn the creation of its own £250,000 regional production fund. But it is not clear how this will be administered or to what end (some cynics have even suggested that this may be a token gesture

by which the Channel can buy its way out of the statutory obligation to 'innovate'). The BFI Production Board has commissioned a report on regional film production (an Interim Report was presented in autumn 1980) and has taken steps to enter the regions, having allocated grants to Cinema Action and Four Corners film workshops last year, and to Sheffield and Nottingham this year. The Arts Council, which funds films directly from London and indirectly through 13 Regional Arts Associations, is now facing a cash standstill. Proposals by both the Independent Film-makers Association and the Association of Cinematograph Television and Allied Technicians (ACTT) toward a more coherent national policy have either been rejected or are still in negotiation.

More generally, it cannot be over-emphasised how disparate and *ad hoc* the decision-making in this area remains. The London Film-makers Co-op, for example, by any reckoning an important independent film centre, survived without official funding for almost a decade; and when it came, it was in the form of a completely anomalous direct grant for equipment. The same applies to individual financing for films. Peter Sainsbury (Head of BFI Production): 'Only the incredibly determined and tenacious types like Richard Woolley can survive the low budgets and haphazard organisation of regional production, and emerge to make features.' To top it all, relations between the seven characters in this epic—the Arts Council, the Regional Arts Associations, the British Film Institute, the BFI Production Board, the Independent Film-makers Association, the Association of Cinematograph Television and Allied Technicians, and Channel 4—are variable at best, acrimonious at worst.

Clearly, this article cannot cover all that ground in depth, but it will try to outline a brief history of regional policy; second, to give some account of recent productions and their aesthetic context; and third, to tackle the problem of institutional politics and its effect on film funding. Written information has come from more than twenty regional sources; quotations are from interviews conducted for the purpose with most of the film officers and administrators involved (RAA film officers; Arts Council and BFI officers in charge of film funding) and with several regional film-makers. About thirty recent productions were viewed. Nevertheless, this article is only a partial view of a complex terrain and, unfortunately, like so much of the paperwork about our film culture, it has been written *from* the metropolis *about* the regions.

*Though some of the documentation thoroughly justifies itself, in particular Sylvia Harvey's pamphlet *Independent Cinema?* and the British Film Institute's current Production Board catalogue.

†Scottish film funding, because of essential differences in the relation between private and public monies, fell outside the scope of this article.

ARTS

CHRIS AUTY

HISTORY

In essence, the history of regional film policy is the history of relations between the BFI and the RAAS—largely autonomous regional bodies funded by the Arts Council and by the Local Authorities in order to support *all* the arts. In the latter half of the 60s, several independent cinema organisations already existed in London, notably Cinema Action, the Other Cinema, the London Film-makers Co-op, promoting political and/or alternative film culture. But in 1968/69 the BFI first began to issue regional subsidy via the RAAS, giving a £1500 grant to Northern Arts. In 1969/70 North West Arts were brought in; and Greater London, Southern and Yorkshire Arts all first received BFI subsidy in 1972/73. Grants at this time were between £1000 and £2500. Since then, the extent and amount of regional funding by the BFI has increased rapidly, rising by almost 500 per cent over the decade, to £700,000 in 1979/80 (this, however, is the *budget* of the Department, not its funding to the regions).

The last region to come into the BFI's orbit was South Eastern Arts, less than two years ago, and the BFI's grants to the RAAS now range from a maximum of £85,000 (Northern Arts) to a minimum of £14,750 (Lincoln and Humberside Arts Association). These figures, however, do not represent the total allocation to each region, because of the system of matching funds. Although the funding of regional projects now outstrips the rate of increase of the BFI's total revenue, a shortage of money still bites locally. Until recently, for example, several regions did not have full-time film officers (regionally appointed within the RAAS). And the creation of posts, for example at the Manchester Film and Video Workshop in 1979, has been undercut by the austerity of the last financial year. The Manchester Film and Video Workshop lost two of its four organisers this spring, with a resultant cutback in 8mm and video training.

During the past decade, debate on how regional film funds should be allocated has been intensive. Was the money meant to fund production above all else? If so, in what form? How were some film groups to be given priority over others? Was the network of Regional Film Theatres going to be connected in any way as an exhibitor of regional films? In the event, the practical answers to these

questions seem to owe as much, or more, to general changes in the cultural climate of the 70s than to local determinants or long-term policy planning. The devolution debate, the relative prosperity of arts funding, and the large number of art college and/or film-oriented humanities graduates, fuelled a fairly rapid growth in demand and debate.

Certain film groups (Amber in Newcastle; Cinema Action and the Co-op in London) had always been regarded as models for regional production. From 1972 onwards, the notion of 'film centres' was being floated by film-makers. Between 1975 and 1977, the related (and constantly evolving) concepts of 'structured programming', 'integration' and 'social practice' were well on their way to achieving their current ascendancy. Essentially, what was being demanded, with varying emphases and essentially by practitioners, were workshops that would double as exhibition sites, forums for debate and centres for distribution—a system allowing independent films to work as social and political tools. The result has been the creation over the last four or five years of 'integrated' regional workshops: the New Cinema in Nottingham, Chapter in Cardiff, Four Corners in London, and—to a lesser extent—Cinema City in Norwich, home of the East Anglia Film Co-op.

But this shift also has a great deal to do with more obscure changes in British culture: a shift from the 'alternative' and formalist film-making spawned by the fine arts in the 60s, to 'oppositional cinema', a cinema intended to challenge television and commercial production directly and on all three fronts at once (production, distribution and exhibition). A key organisation was the Independent Film-makers Association. The IFA, founded in 1976, came to dominate the debate on regional policy by its presence on the Production Board committee; by its lobbying of government bodies (the Annan Report, in 1976; the Meacher Report, 1978/79; the Foundation proposal, 1980); and by its national organisation (especially strong in the East Midlands and South Western Arts areas).

For the record, it should be noted that, on balance, this domination has been a good thing. The IFA has challenged preconceptions, upset bureaucracy, given a voice and a sense of identity to the estimated 1500 independent film-makers working in Britain. Its contribution has been at least partially recognised by the BFI and the RAAS, which have made occasional grants to support its organising officers. Unlike any other pressure group in British cinema, the IFA has

in mind—whether one agrees with it or not—a long-term cultural strategy. Sylvia Harvey, in the current Production Board catalogue: 'It is a cinema whose film-makers are involved in production for cultural, artistic, and social reasons, and not for commercial reasons. The dynamic and motivation of production is the making of meaning, not the making of profit...'

That said, however, one must acknowledge the increasing rigidity of IFA positions in the late 70s. Again, Sylvia Harvey: 'What needs to be constructed is not an alternative culture—a safe place, the eternal safe place of the avant-garde, but an oppositional culture...'. But this too easily dismisses the 'soft' avant-garde of the 60s and early 70s, and is far too uncritical of the 'hard' address of the late 70s in which 'forcing the viewer into a non-passive role' (with an accompanying insistence on de-structuring film, on analysis, on maximising the theoretical input of film work) became too dogmatic for its own ends, a fact which many members came to acknowledge. There are, though, signs of relaxation. At the practical level, this is marked by a rapprochement between the IFA and ACTT—chiefly in hopes of seeing independent work presented on Channel 4. At the theoretical level, it is signalled by the more exploratory approach of *Screen* under its current editorship.

But what is the relevance of this to regional production? Generally, because it is important to see how loose programming, the expansion of Regional Film Theatres, and the 'alternative cinema', all separately coincided with a period of economic expansion in the arts; and that 'social practice', the upturn in theoretical dogmatism, and the promotion of 'oppositional' film occurred at the same time as a general souring of British culture in the late 70s. More practically, it is important because the theoretical and the practical, the regional and the central, held their first serious discussion last autumn at the Warwick conference of Regional Arts Officers.

An Interim Report, commissioned by the BFI Production Board and written by two IFA members, Jonathan Curling and Felicity Oppé, was presented at this conference, attacking the existing aims and practice of regional policy—notably, the lack of concentration in the use of regional resources; and an 'access' mentality which shirked aesthetic and long-term policy decisions. The importance of the occasion should not be underestimated: unlike an earlier independent cinema conference in Norwich's Cinema City (at which the utter unwillingness of

film-makers to talk about finance was the most depressing feature), the Warwick debate seems to have centred on questions of organisation and funding. Many film officers were angered by the tone of the report, but its contents are, on the whole, quite pragmatic: giving priority to workshops; introducing some form of wage element into production grants; and reaching a balance with both the ACTT and RAAS so that independent films from the regions might one day be represented on television (last year, the ACTT and most of the RAAS—following the Production Board—agreed a code of practice paving the way for regional access to transmission by Channel 4).

Despite several recent projects in the regions—the creation of the Cambridge Animation Festival, or the Open Eye distribution workshop in the North West—the cutbacks of the last eighteen months have hit hard. Both the Arts Council and the BFI regional production funds are being eroded by inflation. Under a clumsy and bureaucratic money-matching scheme (also, until recently, operated by the Crafts Council), BFI grants to the RAAS are supposed to be matched by equal amounts of local funding. Since Local Authority finances themselves are sorely pressed, however, the scheme has come to seem unbalanced and unfair. The effect is to breed further anti-film funding prejudice in the RAAS where film is in any case not a favourite child. Meanwhile, the largely unacknowledged contribution made in the late 70s by the Manpower Services Commission (assisting, for example, the creation of Chapter and Four Corners) has dried up. From a central point of view, the real-value cut in budgets has had a warping effect on policy. Barrie Ellis-Jones: 'Now we have to make a choice of priorities—and of course keeping institutions alive has to take precedence over maintaining production.'

In this context, last autumn's announcement that Channel 4 would invest £250,000 in regional production has had a galvanic effect on film-makers and film officers alike. Jonathan Curling: 'At the moment, most people within the IFA think that there should be more alignment with the ACTT, and that's largely because of Channel 4 and the related question of getting our members into the union. The whole thing depends, of course, on the ACTT's understanding of independent production ... which at the moment is very good.' Though certain sections of the IFA, especially in the North East, are ACTT members, the overlap is generally low. But any congruence between these three institutions (the ACTT, the RAAS and the IFA) would mark a real breakthrough—away from the culturally and economically restricted world of independent film towards one which was both diverse and intended for an audience.

A note of caution, however, should be sounded. Ray Lockett, ACTT Deputy General Secretary, an official sympathetic to independent film, refused to discuss Channel 4 at Warwick, since the union was (and is) still trying to reach a



working agreement with Jeremy Isaacs, the Channel's Chief Executive. In any case, the form of the Channel commitments is still uncertain. Peter Sainsbury: 'This is not going to be the panacea required by independent film-makers. Its cash is limited and its potential, though real, is certainly unlikely to accommodate the full range of aesthetic ideas familiar to the Production Board.' A member of the BFI Regional Department paints a cynical, but perhaps even more realistic picture: 'Oppositional cinema is at death's door; it'll be swamped if Channel 4 money comes in ... and strangled if it doesn't.'

PRODUCT

Whatever the range of 'aesthetic ideas' familiar to the Production Board, they cannot surpass the range revealed by recent regional production. The catalogue of titles compiled for May's event at the National Film Theatre stands as a mute monument to mad eclecticism: the Welsh Arts Council productions, for example, include both *Send Out Your*

Homing Pigeons, *Dai* and *An Epistemic Inheritance*. Not to mention *Colchester '73-'76* rubbing shoulders with *Speliogenesis*. In his introduction to the NFT programme notes, Frank Challenger, the West Midlands film officer, makes a careful attempt to tease out the themes of regional production. But it becomes clear that the only aesthetic coherence is one of divergence from 'dominant' (commercial) cinema. And even that is in doubt: a South Eastern Arts production, *Bright Blue Sky for a Ceiling*, went out on circuit release; and Yorkshire Arts' *Speliogenesis* is likely to be blown up from 16 to 35mm and secure circuit booking as a supporting short.

This is surprising, if only because one might assume that the institutions of film culture (whether the BFI, the IFA or the Society for Education in Film and Television, SEFT) would permanently have set their seal on production. Barrie Ellis-Jones: 'We [i.e., BFI officers from London] generally attend all RAA film panel meetings.' Given this degree of supervision, and the composition of the panels, often attacked as a Mafia of film-makers, local arts administrators and higher education personnel with self-serving interests, one might expect conformity across the board. The reason this hasn't happened owes more, perhaps, to the very different preferences of the RAA



Left and top: 'Born Too Late', Robb Hart's documentary on rockabilly and its fans; above, Jacky Garstin's 'Side Effects'.

film officers, and to the collective organisation of their 'clients'. Barrie Ellis-Jones: 'The workshops are companies limited by guarantee; partnerships; co-ops; all sorts. Each has a different history and structure.'

It is also surprising to find that of all regionally produced films well over half are in distribution—whether by the Arts Associations themselves (several of whom—Northern, Merseyside, East Midlands—operate their own distribution); by independent central distributors (the London Film-makers Co-op, the Other Cinema, Contemporary, Circles); or by the BFI itself. Not surprisingly, the half dozen titles available through the BFI (Amy, City Farm, After Peterloo, Repeater, Lina Brooke) tend to reflect the Institute's own radical-with-a-dash-of-art preferences—a taste that carries through to the Production Board's appetite in scripts and to the titles gathered together by the Distribution Department's Consortium (*Fedora*, *L'Age d'or*, *Les Rendezvous d'Anna*, *Lola Montès*, *La Cecilia*, *The Scenic Route*, etc)—films available to Regional Film Theatres and other independent regional outlets.

Though it may have had more impact on paper than in practice, the distribution emphasis of the RAAS is partly the result of 'social practice'—the notion of film-making as an integrated and politi-

cal act that extends from researching a project through production (ideally, group production) to audience participation and encounters between film producers and consumers. As such, the IFA's strategy must be acknowledged as a successful one, and it is a source of bitterness among some members that the effort put into this—as distinct from theoretical work—is so little recognised. Thus, in the Production Board catalogue, Jonathan Curling and Sue Clayton give fascinating and detailed accounts of discussions held with audiences after screenings of their film *The Song of the Shirt* (an over-ambitious, multi-layered attempt to analyse the sexual and political economy imposed on women in Britain since the nineteenth century—and completed with assistance from the Greater London Arts Association). This clearly is social practice of one kind at work, and it throws into deep relief the problems associated with so many Regional Film Theatres: no context, either aesthetic or political, for the films on offer. But another note of caution. As Hilary Thompson points out, 'social practice' is an uneasy term: 'There are dangers... from the loose use of terms like 'social practice' when it is applied solely to differentiate independent film—is *Jaws* (or *Love Story* or *Dallas*) not a form of social practice too?'

As has already been suggested, the debate in regional and independent policy owes a great deal to the Left-leaning activity of a generation of early 70s humanities graduates. Out of some 40 recent regional productions, only two or three could really be called 'apolitical' (whatever that means). But this shouldn't trigger a flood of letters to *The Times*. The vast majority of regional productions are political in only the widest sense: Robb Hart's *Born Too Late* (GLAA), for example, a self-effacing, rather laconic documentary on rockabilly and its fans, makes a couple of asides on the connection between rock culture, colour prejudice and youth politics—but in the most gently nudging way. At the other end of the scale, Mike Leggett's *Sheepman and the Sheared*—a British *Closely Observed Field*—is 'oppositional' only to the extent that the classical avant-garde use of boredom can provoke hysteria and irrational hatred. In between, the possibilities range from the agitational, through conventional narrative and historical documentary to art films. From the sublime, via the casual, to the pointless.

At the top (largely subjectively) one might list: from Greater London, Jan Worth's *Taking a Part*, a cool, formally provocative film of two women talking, one of whom happens to be a prostitute; from the East Midlands, Frank Abbott's *News and Comment*, a variable but generally incisive attack on the way news is presented on television to programme our social thinking; and from Northern Arts, Stewart McKinnon's *Because I Am King*, an uneven, Straubian mixture of private and social images intercut with the performance of a rediscovered Brecht libretto. What unites these latter films is an ingenious fusion of the avant-garde and the agit-prop; but what distinguishes them from the pack is not so much the fusion strategy as their own particular ingenuity. By comparison, the Bristol Film Co-op's *Co-Lignum* (South West Arts) attempts a formally experimental film essay on a political subject, a socialist joinery co-operative in Bristol, and comes unstuck. This counterpoint of political content and formal experiment has been the substance of British independent cinema over the past decade, although the models to which it tends to turn are European rather than British: Godard, Straub/Huillet, Fassbinder, Schroeter and (occasionally) Wenders.

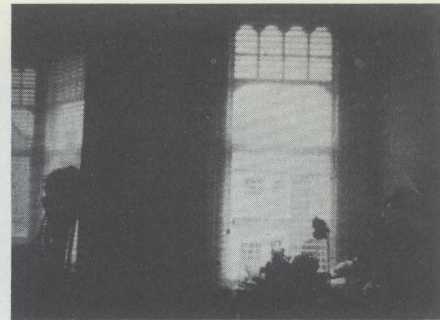
The result is that a film like *Side Effects* (Jacky Garstin, GLAA), which opens out as a fairly straightforward analysis of images of women before turning to wider questions of labour and sexual representation, contains moments of abstract magic that show the deadpan sleight of hand of Straub. The semi-narrative *City Farm* (East Midlands) tries to combine a Leicester background with a sense of anomie and fragmentation—and a handful of the film's moments of slippage are genuinely startling, shaking free of urban realism into some greyer version of Godard. *Destinations*, directed by Russell Murray and featuring Richard Woolley (the

director of *Telling Tales* and *Brothers and Sisters*), is a meticulous pastiche of Wenders—full of virtuoso technique and somehow energetic enough to carry its subject matter: two hipsters of the early 70s learning the uses of nostalgia, becoming kings of the road, supposedly coming to terms with the changes brought about by the Women's Movement (one has one's doubts!).

Which brings us to an interesting observation. Notwithstanding regional eclecticism and differences, it is clear that the Women's Movement has had a startling effect on *all* levels of film activity. In education, there are now many well-attended courses and day-events on 'Women and Cinema'. In distribution, the creation of two independent feminist groups in London (Cinema of Women and Circles) has been mirrored, or even anticipated, in the provinces—most notably by the Birmingham Women's Film Consortium, an alternative 'circuit' which shows independent and other work. And in production, the effect is dramatic. Sheffield Film Co-op has produced *That's No Lady* and, more recently, with Equal Opportunities Commission co-funding, *Jobs for the Girls*—a fictional live-action polemic on how girl school-leavers are forced into the home. Also in the Yorkshire Arts area, the Leeds Animation Workshop has produced *Risky Business*, a witty, caustic and specifically informative fictional animation about a determined (female) shop steward who sets about improving safety conditions in her factory.

Two comments are worth making. First, several Arts Associations have thrown up 'star' film-makers, distinguished either by the way they have completed features (of which very few have been produced in the regions due to the level of funding), or by the extent to which they have obtained repeated funding in their area. This list might include (among others): Richard Woolley in Yorkshire; Stuart Pound in Lincoln and Humberside (*Codex*, *Stylus*); Chris Monger in Wales (*Aesthete's Foot*, *Repeater*, *Enough Cuts for a Murder*, *Voice Over*); John Crumpton (*The Tea Machine*, a laugh a minute satire on British shop floor management) in the North West; Roger Buck (*Industrial Britain*) in Northern Arts. It's striking that they are all *men*—and though several of the films listed here are at least interesting (some are excellent), none is visibly intended for any *specific* audience or exhibition outlet. Which brings us to the second point: whether agitational, avant-garde or historical, the increasingly large number of films made in the regions by women also seem to have a far clearer idea of audience and aims in mind.

In an otherwise infuriating essay in the Production Board catalogue, 'The Use of Independent Films in Education', Rod Stoneman and Chris Rodrigues offer some thought-provoking categories: 'news' films such as *News and Comment* or *Before Hindsight*; 'history' films (*The Song of the Shirt*, *In the Forest*); women's films (*Taking a Part*, *Side*



Top left: 'Because I Am King'; top right: 'Space for Message'; above: 'Riproduzione Vietata'; right: 'Taking a Part'.

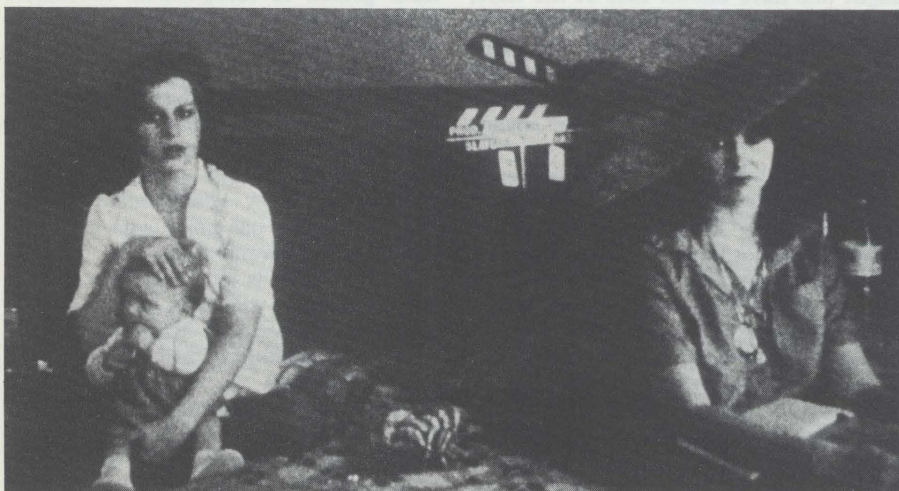
Effects); and art films (such as *Riproduzione Vietata* from the East Midlands, a rather laboured attempt to deconstruct traditional art criticism around the figure of the Renaissance painter Filippo Lippi). To these categories might be added 'art' film, in the sense exemplified by *City Farm* or *Destinations*, and the frankly agitational projects such as *Risky Business*.

We have here a set of basic genres, or rather quasi-genres, since they are defined less by their narrative or their visual style than by content, with which to compare and criticise individual films. These categories also relate intriguingly to the latent genres into which avant-garde practice so often breaks down: the structural or abstract film; the 'home' or 'room' film; the 'body' film; the landscape film. There is, in fact, a fascinating irony on both sides of the fence: that an independent cinema, proclaiming itself formally experimental, has always defined itself through chiefly *subject-oriented* categories.

Clearly the issue here is more than one of financial determinants or avant-garde tradition; it indicates a certain literalness of vision and a reluctance to engage in fantasy—which is perhaps why Peter Greenaway's films or Phil Mulloy's *A History and the City*, for all its faults, come as a breath of cinema into an institutionalised film world. This is not just a question of 'realism', a short-circuiting concept anyway as, in their different ways, both Coleridge and Warhol have demonstrated; nor one of social

training (British 'pragmatism', 'honesty', 'empiricism'); but the symptom of a reluctance to dream that is rooted deep in the icons and imagery of British culture ('From Stubbs to Lowry—a history of British depiction', the programme note might read). This is a difficult problem to isolate because it is so general, but the film funders do, sometimes, obliquely refer to it. When the South West Film Directory comments on a 'recurrent absence in almost all community video work' one thinks immediately of the fantasy-laden use of the form that Godard has made in *France/tour/détour*. And when Peter Sainsbury of BFI Production talks about a 'massive and depressing experience of provincialism' (which includes London), one suspects that the same absence of cinema-dreaming is the subject.

The theoretical political climate of the late 70s has been particularly inimical to Romantic or Surrealist impulses; despite all its aspirations *not* to be so, much of the work done by SEFT (*Screen*, etc.) has been auteurist and defiantly literary. The 'revelation' of Brecht in the mid-70s (paving the way for *Because I Am King*, *Life Story of Baal* and others) was theoretical rather than imagistic—an example only to those exiting from humanities courses who clung to his example as proof that their own abstract hopes of Political Art might be realised. At every level—and crucially in the provinces, where television is now supremely dominant as a purveyor of images—there has been a desperate lack of real visual education.



FUNDS AND POLITICS

The problem of literary and anti-visual bias in education is well established; the academicism of film studies has often been pointed out; but the third corner of the triangle is the tragic extent to which film-funding bodies fight shy of filmic/aesthetic criteria—a habit which seems to be one direct cause of policy problems at national level. The funding criterion used for example by the BFI regional officers in London is that of 'activity'—a well-meant attempt to conserve neutrality. But 'activity' is extremely difficult to quantify and tends to provoke a variant on the chicken-and-egg conundrum: a regional announcement of increased activity provokes higher spending, which in turn supplies further 'activity'.

Officially, in the annual reports of South West and West Midlands Arts, this has been obliquely criticised; unofficially, several RAA film officers admit that they find themselves forced to create the impression of activity in their region in

order not to lose in the next budget sums of money which their region does indeed desperately need. There is clearly a case for creating a stronger sense of central direction based on better criteria—without, of course, allowing a centralist political dominance. This is heightened by the fact that the regions' three central funding sources (the Arts Council, the BFI's regional fund, the Production Board) are adamant that they will not devolve any of their revenue to regional bodies—an understandable, if institutional, reluctance.

Another aspect of the problem can be stated more simply. The amount of central subsidy channelled into film-making and study is inadequate; cruelly so, when it's compared with spending on drama or the other arts. In the same RAA, for example, twenty times as much may be spent on music as on film; film officers are often only part-time; and facilities are primitive: of the regional film groups, only four have sound transfer equipment and only one (Amber in Newcastle) has proper dubbing facilities. In some cases the lack of equipment is highlighted by its availability in a neighbouring educational context. Thus a recent independent production in the London area managed to borrow a pathetically under-used mint condition Arriflex camera and Nagra tape machine from a university college. And the makers of *Spelio-genesis*—a technically extraordinary if rather vacuous caving film—recorded their 33-track sound in a studio belonging to one of the northern universities.

Given the technical limitations and the fact that most production grants are measured in hundreds rather than thousands of pounds, the number of films completed and distributed stands as a measure of the strength of demand for regional production. The ACTT estimated last year that the ratio of demand to supply was roughly 3:1 or 4:1. 'Demand', though, measures only the aspirations of film-makers themselves, and it's hard to estimate the audience potential. (At the Norwich conference, a furious row broke out when Mamoun Hassan (NFFC) challenged Stewart McKinnon (IFA) to prove that the number of 'consumers' for independent film was growing.)

Still, given the fluctuating budgets that result (partly) from the 'activity' criterion, it's impressive to observe quite how distinct the regions remain aesthetically. The Northern Arts area, which includes Amber, is the most established regional film area, the most heavily funded, and is marked by a strong tradition of films based around working-class history. And because many independent film-makers in the area are also ACTT members, they can work as freelance technicians for the regional TV companies. Eastern Arts is less committed to production, but sustains five film workshops including the East Anglia Film Co-op. East Midlands is an IFA stronghold, with a good record in trying to package its films and seek out possible audiences.

Greater London supports five film groups (though not the London Film-makers Co-op) and, not surprisingly, is faced with a huge demand for production grants. In many ways, it is underfunded, despite the availability of other funding in the capital. Welsh Arts is, of all the associations, the most heavily committed to community-oriented video, via the All Wales Video Project—a long-term chronicling of Wales 'from the inside' which began last year. It also boasts one of the recent 'integrated practice' showcases: the Chapter workshop/cinema at Cardiff. Yorkshire Arts is perhaps the most heavily production-oriented area, having supported Richard Woolley in the past; having just produced Russell Murray's *Destinations*; and supporting the film groups already mentioned in Leeds and Sheffield. And so on: one could list the policies and activities of the remaining half dozen associations.

But the real significance of this is not so much to celebrate the determination of film officers and film-makers, as to indicate what *could* occur if funding were adequate. 'Integrated practice' emphasises the funding of groups and workshops rather than individual film-makers (the policy to which the Arts Council is still committed); and this is, at least partly, a reflection of economic austerity. The Meacher Report of 1978 suggested the creation of 25 regional film workshops, each financed to a ceiling of £100,000 a year. Last year's Interim Report commissioned by the Production Board expanded on this by including a wage element and allowing for production inflation, and suggested that the desirable figure would now be

£250,000 a year—a total annual investment of £6¼m, compared with the current regional outlay of perhaps £½m.

In the light of the current arts situation, it is clear that the terms of the Interim Report; or last year's IFA Foundation proposal for a new authority regulating British independent cinema; or even the rather modest terms of the Meacher Report, will never come about. The Eady levy will remain, as at present, in the hands of the duopoly and producers, who have no reason to see it redistributed outside the commercial sector. But two openings of importance to British independent cinema have shown themselves in the last year, and present an exciting challenge to which, on current form, the film funding bodies seem unlikely to respond.

First: it is apparent that the Rank circuit is in difficulty—recent cinema closures have had a damaging effect on the quality of popular life in London, especially south of the Thames. At the same time, it is clear that independent cinema has always lacked a serious and properly funded set of exhibition outlets, both in London and the regions. The BFI has acknowledged this by commissioning a feasibility study of a new independent central London venue (a plan subsequently dropped when it became clear, among other things, that the renovated ICA would be just that). But the BFI should also be considering, it could be argued, the acquisition of, in particular, small cinema sites now being closed. The fund-raising and logistical problems would be considerable, but not insurmountable. Such action would be following up the so far unsuccessful initiatives of independent London distributors who have, it seems, neither the organisational nor the financial resources to undertake the task.

Secondly, and much more feasibly, it is clear, and has been for a long time, that the primary popular visual medium is now video/TV. The establishment of Channel 4, with its statutory obligations, presents a golden opportunity for a planned expansion into video. Central policy is still geared to the creation of 16mm and some 8mm facilities. The number of video facilities in Britain available to the public can be counted on one or two hands, depending on one's assessment of such matters as equipment quality. Apart from community programmes, there are only two well-established public video facilities: Aidanvision in Carlisle (originally set up using Border TV's black and white equipment when they went over to colour), and the Fantasy Factory in London.

Neither the BFI nor the Arts Council has expressed any real curiosity about this possibility: the former has assisted community projects; and the latter has given some capital to London Video Arts. Clearly, there has been a problem in that no large video constituency yet exists to fit the BFI's passive 'activity' criteria. But the potential is immense: broadcast-standard (Channel 4 standard) studios in each region would give a shot in the arm

to British visual education (once the facilities are established the use costs are very low); it would tend to encourage image-making *with an audience in mind*; and it would form the basis of a communal and regional cultural treasury. Both these suggestions (exhibition and video) would, needless to say, benefit the regions directly; both require concerted lobbying by all the institutions involved.

Which brings us, finally, to the thorny question of film culture and its regulating bodies. It must be said that one's view of the current situation in this area is very much a political choice. In retrospect, it is clear that a hazy Fabian optimism doomed the Regional Film Theatre boom from the outset in the 60s. But how might one have known that at the time, from within that very institutional position? One must hope that the new regional workshops—constructed on the notion of 'social practice'—are better established. But this is by no means certain.

There has been a strong tendency within British independent cinema to elide the very different questions of national politics (how to fight the cuts?), institutional politics (how to distribute the cuts fairly?), and aesthetic strategies (how to cut one's own film?). The overall shortage of funding (national politics) must not be re-phrased in institutional terms (via accusations of bias, cliquishness, etc). Nor must aesthetic strategies be re-phrased in institutional terms. It must be decided whether 'social practice' is an institutional choice or an aesthetic one; or, as seems likely, an awkward bit of both. Everything must be made as clear and—in the best sense—pragmatic as possible.

Given these caveats, what are the rights and wrongs of the bodies currently involved in regional funding? It is striking that the ACTT has exercised such finesse in relation to the question of independent cinema. It has negotiated two codes of practice (with the Production Board and more recently with the RAAS) which rationalise independent production; it has made interesting proposals on how regional funding might be improved. On the other side of the fence, the IFA has moderated its own position enough to make involvement with Channel 4 a possibility; and this could mesh into existing RAA activity if proper support for film and video centres were forthcoming. The chaotic differences within the regions are more apparent than real—due partly to the different 'ages' of subsidy in various areas.

But the BFI regional policy itself is piecemeal—it pays token respect to regionalism without respecting it, and it does not give enough of a critical or aesthetic lead in decision-making. The Arts Council as a whole is failing on the most basic level to give sufficient funding to film—and it is clear that a high proportion of films about local artists/cultural activities in the regions (most strikingly in Manchester and the North West), which should be funded by the Arts Council, are being made on a pittance by RAAS. This is not simply a

question of more regional film-makers submitting applications: the main Arts Film budget (almost £400,000) should be administered in such a way as to solicit and encourage regional projects. Lastly, the BFI Production Board: its strength is its sense of identity. Its public weakness is an embarrassing commitment to a middlebrow aesthetic and a central policy; its triumph (diplomatically, at least) has been to invite regional applications and issue £153,000 in regional grants over the past two years, including two grants—to the Sheffield and Nottingham groups—this year. But the fatal weakness *throughout* the system is exhibition: without outlets, film-makers cease to think of films for audiences; and without films geared to recognisable consumers the argument for more state funding appears weak and irresponsible.

Two years ago it would have been true that these six institutions were moving steadily in opposite directions; for the first time it now seems faintly possible that they may come together for the promise of a TV commitment to the cinema. Britain has never seen a serious television involvement in film production. The result is all too evident: unlike our partners in the EEC, we have been denied a medium-cost film industry that crosses the confines of 'art' and 'industry' and articulates a national culture. Whether or not Channel 4 will successfully fill that gap, we must take this opportunity to reorganise. The creation of a nationally owned chain of cinemas to guarantee our film culture is perhaps a dream; but we *could* have a national web of sophisticated video facilities—a very urgent priority—for an initial capital cost of only £4m or £5m.

Whether or not these possibilities can be realised, there is an urgent need to make changes in the existing structures that administer film funding nationally. 'Activity'-based criteria should be phased out in favour of a greater commitment to publicly declared policies. A far larger proportion of existing funding should go toward introducing children to film and video; in the process, job creation should take priority over equipment—if only, cynically, because this commits the funding bodies to a longer-lasting involvement.

At an aesthetic level, the funders must engage in the promotion of visual fantasy, in re-investing video and film with the magic which they should possess as instruments by which to dream. In order to achieve that, there must be a provision of 8mm equipment to schools, and prizes and funds must be established to structure the chaos of naive 'seeing', the inheritance of an absent film culture. School projects should be set up that offer a framework to film by—courses and projects in fantasy film; in animation; in music film; landscape... and any other categories that might offer the visual imagination a form. Only this serious combination of high-level re-investment and low-level re-education, aimed primarily at those now growing up with existing TV, can save our visual and imaginary culture. ■

CANNES

Penelope Houston and Richard Roud report on the films at the 1981 festival

CANNES, 8.20 a.m., 20 May. At this unlikely hour, some people are actually *running* towards the Palais, bent on securing their places for the 8.30 screening of *Heaven's Gate*. Two and a half hours later, the same people no doubt join in the booing (or, more accurately, a kind of dutifully despondent mooing) which greets Michael Cimino's film. It's a curious sense of values, akin perhaps to that which makes people hang about the scenes of motorway smashes, that ensures *Heaven's Gate* the most overflowing audience of the festival's first week. And, in a sense, the audience got what they came for: in its shortened, re-edited form, the film still looks like the calamity that was predicted.

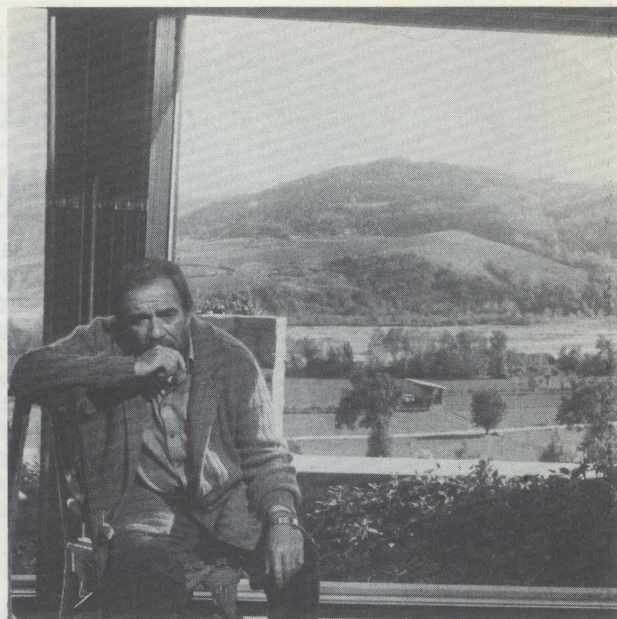
● A pity, because the movie has enthusiasm and, mainly when cameraman Vilmos Zsigmond is given his head, the requisite visual flair. But it is a work of fairly spectacular irrelevances, beginning with the bravura opening of jubilation, dancing and prancing at Harvard (actually, the Sheldonian and other Oxford landmarks). The connection of this lengthy prelude with the main action, taking place twenty years later in Wyoming, is tenuous in the extreme—unless as a grotesquely roundabout and costly way of demonstrating that Marshal Kris Kristofferson's classical education comes in handy when the immigrant settlers in the Johnson County range war build Roman siege weapons. Cimino has muddled, good-hearted notions about the vices of the conniving rich in their alliance with the federal government and the virtues of the immigrant poor, though the latter's time, when not dodging bullets, seems to be spent largely on roller skates. He has an eye for an effect when he sees one. What he seemingly can't for the life of him do is hold a narrative together, tell a story that makes sense, or build a really coherent character. The price will no doubt be paid at the box office; and is paid on the screen by actors like the luckless John Hurt, whose part would seem to have been lost in the cutting room. But the real blame for the overkill should hardly be put on the director, but on a production system so enfeebled, and so easily blown away by a one-picture reputation, that it backs insecure long shots as though they were red hot favourites. The likes of Zanuck and Cohn must be laughing in their graves.

● British producers like the late, great Michael Balcon could have had more cause to cry at the notice prominently displayed on the British stand. 'Conveniently placed between the major film producing countries of Europe and North America, it [Britain] provides an impressive range of services to the world. Excellent studios and laboratory facilities are

available ...' It was impossible to find who had actually written this piece of house agent's prose, with its implication that 'conveniently placed' Britain could be trusted to run up the special effects, but presumably had no further aspirations towards film-making greatness on its own account. The effect was ironic as well as shaming. Meagre though our production will be this year, the show put up at Cannes was far from spiritless, particularly if a British interest could legitimately be claimed in both *Quartet* and *Excalibur*.

● I missed David Gladwell's adaptation of Doris Lessing's *Memoirs of a Survivor*, in the 'Un Certain Regard' section. But in the main competition *Chariots of Fire* went over well, except with some Germans who decided to find it 'nationalistic', and Ken Loach's *Looks and Smiles* was received with respect, if also as a demonstration of Anglo-Saxon understatement which left audiences somewhat taken aback by the actual look of northern England in the 80s. Loach's film, in dour black and white and originally intended for television, looks at life for three youngsters in Sheffield, bounded by the dole queue, fretful family relationships, or an escape to the army in Northern Ireland, which Loach and his scriptwriter, Barry Hines, seem to see rather as a sophisticated route into delinquency. *Looks and Smiles* is an honest, woebegone film, as respectful of its characters as one would expect from this source, though constrained by its acceptance of their limitations. Its England is drab, heavy and old fashioned. And stylistically the film might have been made at almost any time in the last twenty years, as Loach does yet again the sort of thing we know he can do so feelingly. The brutal irony is that twenty years ago, in the days of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, the criticism was of soul-destroying jobs; in 1981 it can only be of soul-destroying joblessness.

● A strange film, also with long distant Free Cinema connections, Alain Tanner's *Light Years Away* seemed to promise much. A cantankerous old party (Trevor Howard), who lives alone in a derelict garage amid a shambles of junked cars, picks up a young man (Mick Ford), the Jonas who was to be 25 in the year 2000. The bullying guru sets his pupil outlandish tasks, from refurbishing and manning a petrol pump from which no petrol is going to flow to setting out to trap an eagle. Spare, concentrated and solitary, the film builds a compelling relationship, based on quirkish oddity, enigmatic irascibility and the acceptance of extreme situations. The setting, in the desolately beautiful moorlands of Western Ireland, puts the wasteland of the motor age into a wasteland fit for fantasy



From left to right: 'Looks and Smiles' (top); 'Francisca'; Klaus Maria Brandauer in 'Mephisto'; Ugo Tognazzi and Anouk Aimée in

and legend. But then, sadly, the film has to lay down its philosophical cards. The old man's addled ambition is to take on the spirit of the birds and to fly into infinity. His legacy for his pupil is a kind of wishy-washy animism ('Every man must find his own tree in the forest'). And the impetus of the film, based on its feeling for artefacts and the sharply defined outlines of its leading players, especially the marvellous Trevor Howard, slowly drains away in rhetoric.

● Another wasteland, another impossible task and another disappointing denouement feature in David Carradine's *Americana*, which he apparently shot in a bare eighteen days as long ago as 1973 and has been putting together in a sporadic fashion ever since. A Vietnam veteran (Carradine) turns up in a village in Kansas, a ramshackle little place with one general store, a garage (the petrol pump prices keep going up five cents or so between sequences) and, in a field, an abandoned roundabout. Obsessively, the soldier sets himself the task of restoring it, rescuing the painted horses and putting the rusted machinery to rights. As an emblematic notion, this may seem simple to the point of simple-mindedness, but it has a splendour—a splendour, one might say, in the grass, since it is the fresh, green and in its quieter moods believable setting that anchors the movie. Carradine writes that the film was shot 'essentially without lights', adding that 'the traditional traps of Hollywood movie-making which this film tries to avoid are too numerous and tedious to mention.' But in the end he does fall into a traditional trap: masochistic violence, a blood-stained, suffering walk like the one in *On the Waterfront*, a symbol-crashing statement out of line with the rather delicate honesty an appealing film had been groping after.

● Another film which has been a long time reaching the screen, this time for reasons of censorship, is the Hungarian Péter Bacsó's *The Witness*. Made in 1969, and first shown in Hungary in 1978, this is a stern but in effect startlingly

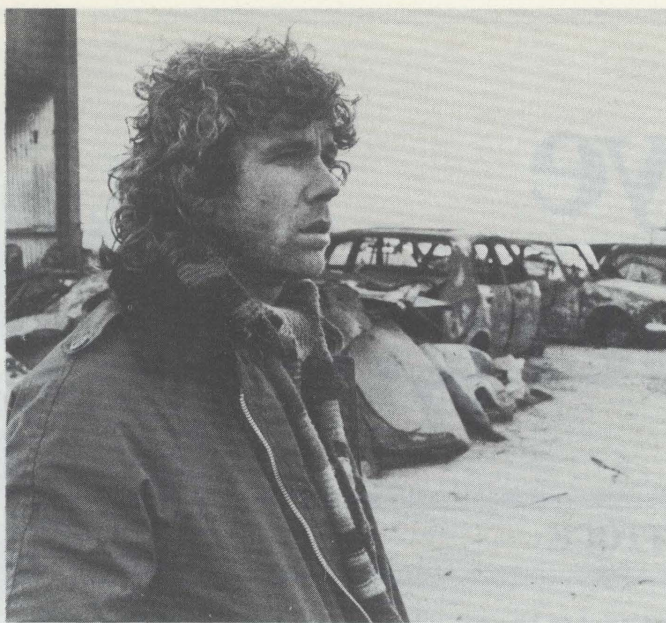
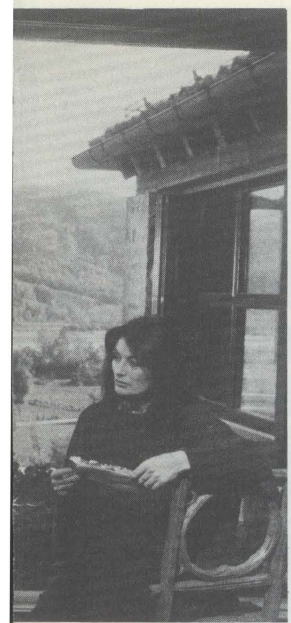
genial satire, a kind of Hungaro-Ealing comedy about the Stalinist years. Its hero, an honest simpleton, goes through a series of eccentric escapades, including the effort to set up the great Hungarian orange industry, whose only dismal fruit is one small lemon, to find that in the end he is required to bear witness at a show trial. He's coached in his evidence ('Oh, that's the sentence,' says his instructor, drawing the wrong document from his briefcase), reduced by elocution lessons to pitifully mumbling the Hungarian equivalent of 'she sells sea shells', even finds himself in the condemned cell, with a warder casting a greedy eye over the prisoner's last meal. Bacsó's script is more inventive than his direction, which is no more than serviceable, but the film is not merely a record of attitudes it was possible to assume to a system but authentically comic. Its phlegmatic, frog-like hero is one of the less tedious of symbolic Little Men.

● The Hungarian film in competition, István Gaal's *Buffer Zone*, was a wan affair, about an exceptionally morose hero trying to come to terms with middle age. At the end, he may seem to be succeeding, as he rushes out into a downpour to help an old lady give her indoor plants a soaking. After the famous affirmative pineapple—a very long way after—comes the affirmative aspidistra. But a film as generally sub fusc as Gaal's seems out of place in the heated competitive atmosphere, suggesting that barrels really may have been scraped in getting this year's entry together. Equally, Thomas Brasch's first feature, *Angels of Iron*, a Langian exercise set at the time of the Berlin airlift and marked by a critical rather than creative intelligence, would surely a few years ago have surfaced in the Directors' Fortnight rather than the main competition. The third film in a mixed bag, however, Ettore Scola's *Passion of Love*, is exactly the sort of movie we seem to have been watching in competition for years. A period piece about a young cavalry officer unfortunate enough to become the love object of his colonel's hideous, sickly and

dangerously neurotic cousin, the film seems to be conscientiously stretching a cruel short story beyond its limits. In fact, it's cut down from a considerably longer TV serial, so that the first half appears all atmosphere and the second half a gallop through the plot.

● An altogether more imposing adaptation of a nineteenth century novel of ill-fated love is *Francisca*, directed by Manoel de Oliveira, the Portuguese veteran whose career John Gillett discusses elsewhere in this issue. De Oliveira is a tremendous stylist, even though his film demands some perseverance. After a first half hour which seemed to be spent largely reading heavily aphoristic French subtitles, in turn translating dialogue delivered with lacklustre impassivity by identically moustachioed gentlemen, one could quite happily have left the cinema. De Oliveira seems to demand an acting style so expressionless as to make Bresson's players look lively. But one gradually realises that his command of his means of expression is total, every effect judged, each static tableau or burst of action or sound directed towards a more lucid reading of the theme. The effect is in fact rather that of reading a novel, complete with mysteries, longueurs, and odd, dazzling scenes, like the caller who rides his horse calmly into the house, or the extraordinary marriage scene (Buñuel, indeed) in which the principals are represented by proxies at the altar, followed by a totally silent wedding breakfast. De Oliveira has the manner of a master; and may indeed be one.

● The best feature I saw at Cannes—most accomplished, most adroit, most effortlessly pleasurable—was Eric Rohmer's *La Femme de l'aviateur*, to be found in the market section. Tom Milne discusses the film at length elsewhere. Here, it's enough to endorse his comments; and to note that particular kind of modesty which remains Rohmer's exceptional strength. Very few directors who have attained his stature are content to go on working on so small a canvas; or, if the director himself might be satisfied,



'Tragedy of a Ridiculous Man'; Mick Ford in 'Light Years Away'.

he will by that time have acquired a retinue who demand the bigger things that supposedly lead to the more glittering prizes. Unruffled, seemingly, by any considerations outside his own view of how he wants his work to develop, Rohmer returns here to the intensely sympathetic view of a handful of talkative characters. As in the *Moral Tales*, the fascination is in the shuffling of the cards, to suggest that beneath the pattern of what is there remains always the possibility of what might be.

● Other features seen in a week at Cannes were mainly hard going. It is, no doubt, getting more difficult for even this festival to string together a selection which is more than representative and respectable. Gilles Jacob, the festival director, has suggested that the quality of world output is not what it was—a perennial complaint, of course, even in periods which later come to be celebrated as some kind of golden age. But there was a subdued, slightly worried feeling about the place this year, as though all the euphoria of a decade or so ago had finally burnt itself out. New directions, perhaps, are called for; the big new talents even more so.

● Meanwhile, two fairly engaging experiences were not strictly features. The Austrian Robert Dornhelm's *She Dances All Night* is an attempt to explore aspects of Nijinsky's personality in the light shed by the reminiscences of his daughter Kyra, via the device of a film within a film. Bud Cort engagingly plays the diffident young documentary director, whose main task is to try to come to terms with the formidable presence of Kyra Nijinsky; and the lady plays herself, commanding the film rather in the manner that two even more eccentric ladies dominated the Maysles' *Grey Gardens*. *She Dances Alone* employs rather too many tricks and devices, including the introduction of a solemn little ballet school child who finds herself playing a variation on the infant Kyra to the old lady's impersonation of her own domineering mother. But a dauntless display

of outsize personality commands, on the screen, the kind of mesmerised attention one might be reluctant to give it in life; and that the film certainly musters.

● The other unexpected pleasure was Agnès Varda's *Mur Murs*, a documentary about the murals that decorate areas of Los Angeles. Interviews indicate the remarkable range of interests, with strong Mexican influences, represented in the creation of these works; which in themselves range from the haunting (like the *trompe l'oeil* effect of the painting of an empty street corner looking down on the street itself), to the propagandist, the commercial or the frankly hideous. Varda's witty, gentle film includes some entrancing effects: the artists represented in a painting who step forward alongside it to identify themselves, or the food factory whose entire lengthy perimeter wall is decorated with studies of pigs, virtually a life work for their patient creator. A television arts programme might pick up this kind of subject, evidently in its way a gift; but Varda makes of it her own film, a wayward display of idiosyncratic sympathies.

● Finally, one should record the screening of John Huston's *Let There Be Light*, the long suppressed documentary about the treatment of shell-shocked soldiers in World War Two. One intriguing aspect of the film is that in angles, treatment and style it looks so like a Warners feature of its time. Another is that the emphasis is so solidly on optimism, as patients like the young soldier who can hardly speak, or the amnesia victim, are put through brisk sessions with the actorish doctors and seemingly immediately recover their faculties. As a legendary film, this one hardly survives its long delayed encounter with the light of the projector. This propaganda from the past, ending on the soft sell of a hospital baseball game, with everyone back on his feet and joining in, retains the glib and instant quality of a popular magazine article of its day. The real historical comment is that it was indeed thought too disturbing to be shown. P. H.

The second week of the Festival was dominated by Eastern Europe: Andrzej Wajda's *Man of Iron* and István Szabó's *Mephisto* were, I think, the two most impressive films seen at Cannes. Admittedly, this was not too remarkable a feat, for this has been one of the most mediocre—and morose—festivals in recent years.

● On all counts, however, both the Wajda and the Szabó films are considerable achievements. This is the first time that Szabó has adapted a pre-existing work: Klaus (son of Thomas) Mann's novel *Mephisto*. Written in 1936, though not published until 1949, the novel is a *roman à clef*: its anti-hero was the great German stage actor Gustav Gründgens, a man who embraced the Nazi faith for purely professional reasons. He wanted to get ahead; he wanted to be loved and admired at any cost. The film, however, uses the novel only as a basis: Szabó is not particularly interested in the Gründgens case, but rather in the problem of the artist—or, indeed, of anyone—who thinks that he can lead an existence apart from politics.

The film is a Hungaro-German coproduction, spoken in German, and the lead is played by a great Austrian theatre actor, Klaus Maria Brandauer. Not only does Brandauer succeed in ageing convincingly in the role, but he manages that most difficult of feats of appearing persuasively inexperienced in his early stage performances, seeming to play with more and more authority as the film progresses. In Gründgens' most famous role, that of Mephisto (Mephistopheles) in Goethe's *Faust*, he achieves a performance which older German friends tell me is as good as Gründgens, yet in no way a copy. Except for last year's *Confidence*, it has seemed to me that Szabó had mined for far too long the lode of his childhood and adolescent experiences, and it is rewarding that he has not been 'ashamed' to try an adaptation instead. There are far too many directors today who feel that they must be complete *auteurs*, that it is somehow degrading not to film their own original scripts; which, as Resnais has proved, is nonsense.

● Wajda's *Man of Iron* is not only a film—it is an Event. For the first time, perhaps, in the history of the cinema, a director has been able to make an important work about truly contemporary political events. Godard and Straub always said that they needed time to digest, to understand and to compose political realities into a work of art. But miraculously Wajda has succeeded in making a film about the events in Gdansk last autumn and even their aftermath.

In one sense *Man of Iron* could be described as a sequel to *Man of Marble*, but it is also in a sense a new—and more complete—version of the earlier film. Because of the change in the climate of opinion in Poland, this film tells us not only about the son of the man of marble, but much more about the man of marble himself. Only now do we learn that this man—the Stakhanovite worker of the 50s

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Goodbye Gutenberg...

BY JOHN CHITTOCK

It has taken quite a few hundred years for print to become widely accessible. With illiteracy still a major problem in the world, it may be argued that accessibility to print is not merely an economic condition but a social one as well. The quintessence of the problem of accessibility to the media has been seldom exemplified more seriously than with film (and in recent years, with television too).

Partly it is a technical, commercial and physical problem, which is why the film society movement in Britain was created. The original Film Society, established in London in 1925, had as its main purpose the public screening of foreign films which commercial exhibitors were ignoring. How else, with the cost and technical paraphernalia involved, could people interested in the cinema hope to see some of the masterpieces of foreign film-makers? In its first season in 1925, the Film Society screened 39 films—20 of which had never before been seen in England.

The cinema has also had another accessibility problem, a cultural one which, arguably, modern television suffers too. It was poignantly expressed by Britain's first professor of film, Thorold Dickinson, when he condemned our failure to regard film as an essential part of formal education: literacy was important, but (coining a new word for the English language which has never been adopted) what about cinemacy?

The arrival of video in the last few years could provide the catalyst for change which until now the moving picture has desperately needed. Initially, this change may be possible for technical and commercial reasons—but ultimately subtle cultural influences could be liberated in a way that has been hitherto impossible.

The transformation on a technical level arrived with the availability of videotape recorders at a price which makes them accessible to most consumers. It is now possible to buy a video recorder for under £400, two-thirds the cost of a 16mm sound projector. The sales of video recorders have heralded a boom in this new medium which in growth patterns rivals that of broadcast television when it was first introduced. Both in the UK and the US, annual sales of video machines in the first few years of this industry have closely matched the early sales graphs of television receivers. The reason for this boom, which never happened with 16mm projectors, is of course simple: you don't need expensive copies of 16mm films in order to screen films on a video recorder (you just illegally tape them off-air, courtesy of the BBC or ITV); and to replay them, you don't need the darkened room, the cables and the aggravation which 16mm projection at home inevitably involves.

That is a simple enough and obvious

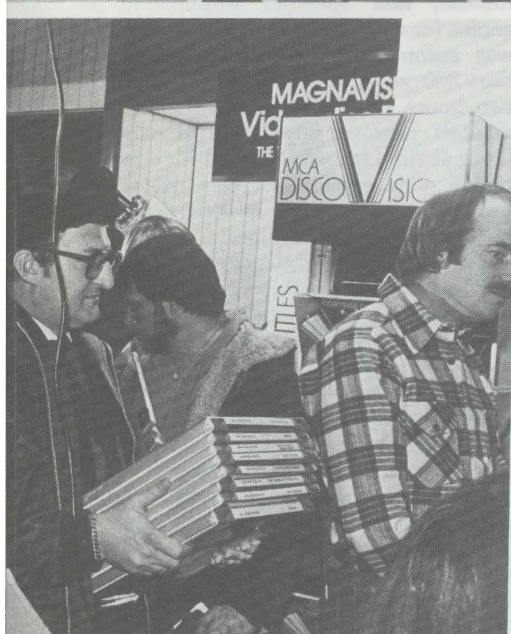
point. So too is the dramatic reduction in the cost of the print stock for distributors—one hour of 16mm film about £150 (at minimum prices), one hour of a videocassette about £15. Equally important, the technical procedures involved in putting a 35mm feature film on to videocassette are simpler than with 16mm film and more suited to the economic needs of the independent distributor handling only a few copies of each title.

Many film purists will argue (with great justification) that a viewing of Ridley Scott, Antonioni or Abel Gance on a small television screen is no substitute for the real thing in the Warner, Leicester Square. And of course it is not—in resolution of detail or in tonal range of brightnesses reproduced (apart from screen size). But *Picture Post* was no substitute for seeing an original Bill Brandt bromide print, nor is the *Sunday Times Colour Magazine* going to do full justice to a Patrick Lichfield colour transparency; but if it makes photographic art available to the masses, that



Top: March 1981: RCA's advertising for its first range of video discs.

...Hello Hollywood?



Above: Atlanta, 1979: customers scramble for video discs, some even without players.

can't be altogether bad. Perhaps we must accept that if any form of art is to be more widely accessible, there is a price to pay somehow.

Yet the viewing of films via video is not confined to the television set in the living room. At the last count, there were 11 auditoria in the UK devoted to the public screening of films via video projection—that is, using equipment similar to television receivers, fed by videotape recorders, but utilising cathode ray tubes designed for maximum brightness when used to project their images on a small cinema size screen. The film industry has been highly critical of the poor technical quality achieved, but none the less these video theatres report good attendances and few public complaints. What is more important, perhaps, is that in the future the quality of projection should improve; early ventures have used unsatisfactory technical arrangements and in any case it may not be long before high definition television systems, tailor-made for this purpose, become commercially available.

As an experiment in testing the possibilities with video projection under optimum conditions, I have been responsible for organising two public demonstrations in London which made direct comparisons with 16mm projection. For these experiments—one at the BP cinema in the Barbican, the other at BAFTA—a Mitsubishi video projector was fed by a Philips optical video disc player. The latter yields a television signal of broadcast standard bandwidth (unlike domestic videotape recorders). We obtained a video disc copy of a feature film—*Sweet Charity*—of which a 16mm print was also obtained from the UK distributor. The film print was projected to yield a picture the same size as the relatively small Mitsubishi screen, and the same sequence was located on both disc and 16mm print so that the two could be run side-by-side in approximate synchronisation. The video side of the system was still less than optimum UK quality because we were obliged to use American NTSC equipment of 525 lines standard.

The general consensus of both audiences (in each case well over 100 people) was that the inferior quality of the video picture was not of great significance. Extraordinarily, the video projection was actually *brighter* than the 16mm film; and the sound quality was infinitely

superior. Only in respect of picture sharpness was the video picture obviously inferior, but not sufficiently to cause most of the audience any displeasure. (It should be noted that this experiment reproduced better video projection conditions than have been achieved in some other tests and it is not doubted that appalling quality in video projection is quite easy to find.)

Clearly an experiment of this kind is of importance to some film viewing groups, especially film societies, academic and educational audiences and film students. It is important because a great deal of film material is simply not available on 16mm film—often for commercial reasons (it's just too expensive to justify the print costs) and sometimes for technical reasons (the National Film Archive may offer plenty). Video can be especially useful if technical problems prevail. For example, a colour print which has faded in storage can be restored in electronic processing, and subtitles could be added by electronic generation more cheaply than by photo-chemical means.

On a purely technical level then, video promises greater accessibility to films. But that is only one aspect of the video revolution. With the arrival of a large consumer market for pre-recorded videocassettes—by the end of 1981 we may reach one million units in the UK alone—the right financial incentives are there for the film industry to make its products available over the counter and not at the whims of a cinema exhibitor. Suddenly, the cinema has ceased to be a scheduled experience; it has become almost as accessible as literature or music.

If the film industry reckons that broadcast television has generally given the cinema a rough deal—buying its output at absurdly low prices (unless it was a James Bond movie)—the 16mm distributors have offered even less in the way of additional revenue. This has hardly been their fault, because the market for 16mm prints is just too small. With an estimated 100,000 16mm projectors in Britain, it is not unusual for a renter to carry fewer than half-a-dozen copies of one title, sometimes no more than one or two copies.

Despite the emphasis on adult movies, the home video market has changed this availability problem. Thorn EMI, for example, at the time of writing had sold

'Five years from now network transmissions on BBC and ITV will have increased by some 5,000 hours in a full year and at most only 200 of these hours will be new British television drama.'

over 4,000 video copies of *The Deer Hunter*; in just two and a half weeks after releasing *Halloween*, Video Programme Distributors (run by 20th Century-Fox's ex-16mm manager, Brian Payne) claimed to have sold 4,000 cassettes of the film to the trade; and in the US a number of film titles have won 'Golden Cassette' awards for turning over more than \$1m in revenue.

That is a quantitative look at the situation. Qualitatively, there is a rapidly growing choice, emerging from the current lists which total more than 1,500 titles in the UK alone. As an example of the range available, some randomly chosen titles include *Annie Hall*, *Cries and Whispers*, *They Shoot Horses Don't They?*, *The Go-Between* and *Woodstock*; much older films range from Chaplin (*The Tramp*, *The Champion* and many others) through epics like *All Quiet on the Western Front* and rarities like *The Queen of Spades*. In the US, some new titles are being released within 90 days of their cinema release. And for minority audiences, such as the Indian community in the UK, entire catalogues of films on videocassettes are now available. It may be some way to go before the choice, qualitatively, is representative of world cinema, especially with foreign films. But once the big clean up of popular titles has reached saturation point, it is fairly certain that, with the continuing growth of the market, films with narrower appeal will become available.

All this has started to happen in only two years. In 1979, the video recorder market was in its infancy. Now all the Hollywood giants are deeply immersed in the business—Paramount, Universal, Walt Disney, 20th Century-Fox, etc. Now that a film society can buy a videocassette of a movie at a price comparable to the rental cost of a 16mm feature, the upheaval is inevitable. And for the rental market, hiring titles at £5 for three days, there is more to the economic attractions than just the low cost of tape. An average 16mm print in a library will be lucky to survive 60 bookings—wear and tear is as frightening as checking and maintenance is expensive; but a videocassette can easily survive 500 screenings and is almost (not quite) immune to unskilled handling.

This is the story only so far, with the business in its infancy. The first Tele-video TV commercial promoting feature films available on cassettes yielded 2,000 enquiries in the first few days. When the UK population of video recorders grows to some 5 million in the next few years, the cinema industry will never be the same again.

For those who believe that video is a greater threat to the film industry than television was in the 1950s, think again. In the short term at least this revolution is—for the production end of the business—a saviour. It is the cinema exhibitors who are the losers. Yet the most insidious dangers lurking in the shadows are probably for those in broadcast television.

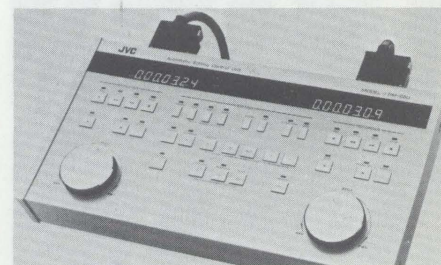
Until now, the broadcasters have been able to get feature films on the cheap—£5,000 for a screening has been a not untypical fee. And with the popularity of feature films with the television public, and the rocketing costs of original TV productions (drama exceeding £100,000 per hour), it is not surprising that the Wilson Committee, the ACTT and cinema owners the depth and breadth of the land have complained about the way that television has been milking the film industry.

But enter the free market economy. In video, the broadcasters have a rival bidder, and a distribution network where the public is at last paying realistic prices to view single feature films. For broadcast television, this poses a real dilemma for the future. The BBC's head of planning, Mike Checkland, said at a Royal Television Society conference last year, 'I will hazard a guess that five years from now network transmissions on BBC and ITV will have increased by some 5,000 hours in a full year and at most only 200 of these hours will be new British television drama... one of the reasons there will only be 200 hours is because they will cost £40m to produce.' And later added, 'This expansion of broadcasting is being planned at a time when there are fears about the growth of advertising income in commercial television and the BBC is having to make substantial economies in its operation.'

In this economically challenging situation, the broadcasters will find themselves participating in Dutch auctions for feature films against the prospering video business. Inevitably, the television companies will have to adopt the tactic of joining 'em if you can't beat 'em, turning to the video market as an important source of new revenue. This is already happening, and most UK television broadcasters have done deals of some kind to put their programmes into video distribution. One consequence of this could be a further erosion of production output for new cinema feature films, because television will be competing for the same additional revenues of the video market which at present are providing a boost for some sectors of the film industry.

Before taking the story further—to examine the cultural implications of this—it is necessary to understand how the technical developments of video are moving. It is not merely as simple and straightforward as home videotape recorders, although events in this field are moving fast enough.

Videocassette recorders. There are now three established home videocassette systems—all using half-inch tape but non-compatible with each other: Beta (pioneered by Sony), VHS (developed by JVC) and V2000 (the third generation system introduced by Philips). The problem of compatibility has become one that the industry is learning to live with. For home recording it is of no consequence; only the distributors have cause for complaint because they now have to carry titles in up to three different formats.



JVC editing control unit.

There is, additionally, the U-matic three-quarter-inch format designed for professional users and perhaps largely irrelevant to the consumer. This yields higher quality but is a larger and more expensive machine.

Other systems have been promised, such as Toshiba's extraordinary LVR (for Longitudinal Video Recording). This offered extended recording time by cramming 300 tracks into the width of a very short endless loop of videotape, the record/playback head jumping to 'read' a new track on each cycle of the tape. This meant dramatically lower tape cost per minute, and speedier duplication of copies (one cycle of the endless tape loop was accomplished in 24½ seconds, so that 300 × 24½ seconds equalling over two hours could be copied in one 24½ seconds pass—a huge improvement on the real-time transfer needed for conventional videocassettes). But it seems unlikely that systems of this type will now reach the marketplace.

The established videocassette formats are continually subject to technical improvement and operational refinements. More recent models, for example, incorporate cue and review features—effectively visual search of programmes at fast winding speeds, as well as reasonably satisfactory 'freeze frame' facilities. The Philips V2000 system offers extended playing time over its rivals—2 × 4 hours on one cassette (which has to be turned over, like an audio-cassette, after four hours). Sony have introduced for their Betamax a cassette auto-changer, so that more than one cassette can be loaded up for automatic replay.

Video discs. These represent a challenge

to the videocassette, with their lower copy cost, higher quality, longer (or infinite) life, and instant access to any part of the programme. But they do not allow the user to record. Again there are three non-compatible systems—those of optical LaserVision (developed by Philips), and the electro-capacitance rivals produced by RCA (called SelectaVision) and JVC (called VHD). Only two are so far available commercially, and then only in the US—RCA's SelectaVision and Philips' LaserVision.

Why should video discs, void of a recording facility, have much to offer over videotape cassettes? Superior picture quality and stereo sound are undeniable advantages, and the duplication cost of a disc is probably about one-third that of a cassette. In the case of the optical disc, it will never wear out and is resistant to quite careless handling. But most important of all, it offers the potential of a new mode of flexibility in replaying images.

This advantage, superbly refined in the Philips system (and available to a lesser extent in VHD) means that the user can access any part of a one hour per side disc instantly. Any section can be replayed in slow, fast or reverse motion. And still frames can be held—with perfect quality—for seconds, hours or even days without wear (in the case of optical discs). On the Philips discs, every frame carries its own electronic frame number, which can be displayed on the TV screen at will by operating a switch on the player. Thus a rapid index number search can be used to locate any one of the 54,000 frames per side; and on more sophisticated models, the frame can be 'called up' instantly by punching out its number on a remote control keypad.



Philips VLP video disc system.

This latter facility means that the user has infinite and immediate control over any part of the disc, either as still pictures, moving pictures, slow and fast motion sequences or any variation in between. For more sophisticated applications, the control can be entrusted to a microprocessor or even a computer—so that, for example, interactive programmes are possible which display different parts of the disc depending on the user's responses. The disc can 'ask' a question (displayed as wording on one frame), demanding a response on the keypad—and depending on that response, the microprocessor will search out the next appropriate part of the disc (moving or still picture), and so on.

It is a mind-bending experience. In its simplest consumer application it will lead to programmes such as the BBC Video

'The user has infinite and immediate control over any part of the disc, either as still pictures, moving pictures, slow and fast motion sequences or any variation in between.'

Book of Birds—one of over 100 titles promised when LaserVision is launched in the UK later this year. This particular programme will contain an encyclopedia of visual information on birds, ranging from colour still pictures (all electronically indexed) to moving picture sequences of flight, gait, etc. Add hi-fi stereo sound of bird songs, and the potential of the disc begins to take shape.

Instead of stereo sound, the programme can offer two discrete soundtracks, switchable by the user. This immediately provides room for a foreign language version on the one disc. A number of further languages as teletext subtitles can be additionally programmed in, again switchable in or out by the user. Thus the elaborate business of preparing separate copies of a film for each foreign version is eliminated. Numerous versions can be incorporated in the one disc.

Camera origination. Until now, the emphasis has been on using video as a playback device. The origination of programmes on television cameras and videotape is generally accepted as a much more complex process than using film, despite the arrival of lightweight, low-cost video cameras.

It is true that origination on video leaves much to be desired compared with film shooting. For a start, the more portable equipment is still expensive, heavy and cumbersome, involving trailing cables, power supplies, etc. The quality is inferior, even alongside TV broadcast reception, unless professional equipment costing thousands of pounds is used. Editing is more complicated than with film, unless very sophisticated equipment is employed. And if the end result is required on film, the transfer of a videotape on to film involves quality losses which show up on the cinema screen in a most unacceptable way (compressed tonal range, poor definition, low colour saturation). None the less, the gap between film and videotape origination is narrowing. Amateur film cameras will be seriously challenged in the next few years when Sony introduce their home video-recorder camera, a remarkable development which looks like an 8mm film camera, but in fact incorporates a built-in videotape recorder using cassettes about the size of a dictation micro-cassette. The quality replayed on a TV set is excellent, and a simple editing unit will be available, the total package costing about £500.

In the meantime, film origination is under some threat in broadcast television due to the development of ENG cameras. These lightweight television cameras

(acronym of Electronic News Gathering) allow greater location mobility for action coverage where once film cameras were the only practicable equipment. As is widely known, the introduction of ENG cameras into broadcasting has been accompanied by union problems almost as severe as those caused by new technology in the newspaper industry.

Yet ENG as we currently know it is only the tip of the iceberg. RCA have just announced a new ENG camera which dispenses with the cable links to a nearby video recorder or to a microwave transmission link. Instead, RCA have built a VHS format video recorder into the back



Sony's single unit camera/recorder.

of the camera, thus eliminating all external cables and separate boxes of equipment. The most staggering part of this development is RCA's claim that the system yields broadcast quality recording superior to the so-called high band U-matic system currently used for some location broadcast work. Since VHS until now has been a domestic system, this latest development could have enormous consequences, not least of which could be further reaction from the unions, whose location VTR operators could be made redundant.

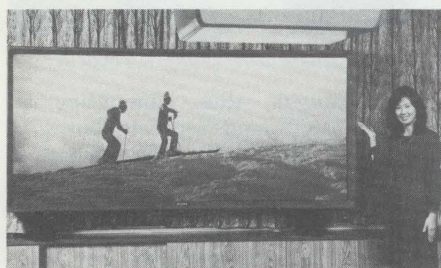
Special Effects. Apart from the high cost of motion picture stock relative to videotape, and some of the operational advantages of video recording (e.g., instant replay of rushes), electronic image systems offer great scope in the use of special effects. This means not only being able to perform clever tricks that might be difficult on film, but being able to do them more cheaply, more quickly (without extensive laboratory stages in between) and to a higher standard of quality. The last point is the most pertinent about electronic image recording. Superimpositions, duplicate copies, third and fourth generation transfers, combined printing, all can be accomplished electronically without the serious degradation that occurs every time a film image is transferred to a new generation.

What is not generally understood about television is that, because it is an

'What cable and satellite TV does ... is to put the distribution of programmes or films into the hands of private operators who have available the means for governing the revenue they generate.'

electronic process where control over the process can be precise, it is capable of higher fidelity in colour reproduction than film. Photo-chemical processes are capricious, and the simultaneous processing of the three colour layers in one strip of film means that selective control of each primary colour is impossible—a compromise is being effected. In electronic colour reproduction, each of the three primary colours making up the full colour image is separately 'processed' and adjusted as necessary. Thus it might be said that television image recording is an open-ended technology, whereas film recording is a process where further improvement is less likely in the future.

Large screen video projection. In one respect alone, television remains unquestionably inferior to film—on the large screen. Even with the latest video projectors, where screen brightness begins to emulate that of film projection, two serious shortcomings prevail: inferior



Sony CinemaScope format projector.

definition and reduced brightness range. The latter is a problem that is difficult to overcome, and regrettably less important. The average viewer is probably insensitive to the fact that television pictures have a much more compressed tonal range than those seen on a cinema screen. However, the cinemagoing public is more conscious of impaired definition. With television pictures this is largely (but not wholly) due to the limitations imposed by the reconstruction of TV pictures via a raster of 625 lines. None the less, high definition television systems are now in very advanced stages of development—not for home TV reception, but as a real alternative to film recording and projection. The day is not far away when such systems will offer enough in terms of quality and cost to pose a serious threat to sprocketed ciné film.

In the meantime, small and *relatively* inexpensive video projectors are now finding their way into pubs, clubs and more affluent homes. Perhaps the film society of the future (usually with audiences of no more than 60–70 people) may operate in the local hotel, which will

provide video projection as a standard facility in the private rooms. There will be great incentives for hotels to equip themselves in this way, as some are already doing, not merely to service special bookings but to draw in customers to watch important TV broadcasts, General Election coverage, Cup Finals and the like.

So much for some of the technological changes. But the developments which have attracted as much concern as any in the film industry are undoubtedly cable TV and satellite TV. Although the technology of these is important, their impact has been significant because of commercial and political developments.

What cable and satellite TV does, effectively, is to put the distribution of programmes or films into the hands of private operators who have available the means for governing the revenue they generate. Traditionally, broadcast television has been a state monopoly, and a service for which the viewer at most pays a negligible annual licence fee. Cable systems provide a basis for charging the individual viewer for what he actually sees—by a subscription fee, a metering system or credit charging via the cables from the receiver to the station.

In the midst of much hysteria over cable and satellite TV, it is important that this difference is delineated. It brings television programming closer to that of the cinema, putting it not only into the hands of private operators but also in a position where the public pays for what it sees at a price based on what the market will stand. This could mean for the traditional TV broadcasters, faced with a fight against rising costs and uncertain revenues, that the quality feature film may start to move beyond their purchasing power. But for the producers and the film studios, the balance may be redressed after more than two decades of tough competition from television. Left behind will be the cinema owners, reduced to the management of tightly run ships in an era of space travel, rather like the London theatre.

Yet it is not quite as simple as that. Cable and satellite television have taken off in a big way in the US, and much of the excitement in Europe has been generated by the belief that what happens in North America will happen elsewhere later. Cable television in the US originally spread as a way of overcoming poor television reception off-air, and with the huge size of the continent it subsequently became popular for its additional facility in bringing to regions other distant TV stations not nationally available. In the

UK, with about 98 per cent of the country able to receive BBC and ITV, the same incentive for cable does not exist. At best, cable can offer viewers maybe an extra ITV region (in addition to the local one) and a subscription TV service. The latter, now approved on an experimental basis by the Home Office, will be hardly a licence to print money. It relies on the present availability of a limited cable TV network in the UK which has been relaying broadcast TV to rental customers (who usually get the receiver as part of the service); this originated in urban areas (where signal reception was poor) as well as in blocks of flats, etc.

There are about 4½m homes in the UK within reach of one of these established cable systems, but only about 2½m are actually connected. Since the capital cost of connecting more homes would be substantial (a figure of £2,600m has been one guess to cover all the UK), it is certain that for the foreseeable future cable TV in Britain will be confined to that 4½m top figure. But add to the existing cost of the television licence a further £5 to £8 per month for the new subscription service (additional to £10 per month TV set rental fee which makes the relay available) and cable TV begins to look expensive for the average viewer. In fact, a videocassette recorder can be rented for less than the same monthly outlay of £8 plus £10. Is it likely then that the existing 2½m subscribers will even grow to a maximum of 4½m? More probably, with the availability of feature films on video, the figure will shrink.

This arithmetic is a necessary introduction to the prospects for satellite television in the UK. For the domestic viewer in Britain, satellite TV will be viewable by one of two methods—directly, via a household dish aerial (hence the initials DBS, for direct broadcast satellites), or relayed through a cable network from a local station equipped with very large dish aerials. The first possibility, DBS, looks very unlikely. Current domestic dish aerials offered by one firm in the US range in size from 3m to 6m at prices of \$6,995 to \$12,500. Smaller one metre dishes are available at much lower prices, and ultimately RCA have predicted that a 0.6m dish will be feasible at \$500. Note—*ultimately*—and only with a mass market wanting them. Already, the RCA SelectaVision video disc player can be bought for \$495 in the US.

Even with a dish aerial, the user has other disincentives. The dish must be very accurately sited so that it lines up with the geostationary satellite it is intended to receive. It must have a direct 'line-of-sight' view of the satellite, and if any buildings are in the way it must be located elsewhere—which for many homes may mean that no other site is available. Environmentally, it is cumbersome. And even when satisfactorily sited, it can only receive the satellite at which it is aimed. In the case of the satellite position allocated to the UK, this means a point in the sky 31 degrees West—rather low on the horizon. And no other satellites can be picked up unless the aerial is realigned—obviously

impracticable; or is steerable—extremely expensive.

DBS in Britain is thus an unlikely prospect. So the future of satellite TV here will be dependent on local cable TV relay. A further monthly charge could provide cable subscribers with this facility—offering, say a wide choice of European TV programmes plus feature film pay channels (the subscriber pays an extra charge for these, which otherwise appear 'scrambled' on the receiver). With such a good indigenous TV service in Britain, it all seems a rather unlikely prospect. Before cable TV and satellite has a real chance to get established in Europe, there will be many more homes already owning video recorders or players than cable can hope to reach.

It should be noted, too, that cable television (and effectively satellite television) remains under the control of governments; the commercial distribution of video programmes, like books, does not.

One reason for the explosive growth of video has been the wide availability of pornographic programmes. At one time, over 65 per cent of pre-recorded cassettes were 'adult' movies, although it is now nearer 25 to 30 per cent as more general entertainment material has been released. We have yet to witness the party political videocassette, or the anti-semitic, anti-black, anti-white or anti-establishment, but no doubt in time they will become available. Since the owners of videocassette and video disc machines are also precisely definable—unlike the anonymous drifts of cinemagoers and TV viewers—the marketing of minority and specifically aimed programmes will become much more economically viable. Thus anyone from anglers to zoologists, balletomanes to photographers, will be accessible, with precision and not wasteful saturation coverage.

These realisations will certainly lead to sponsorship and advertising creeping into video programmes. For those industries whose products are either banned from TV or are socially suspect in certain contexts, it could mean a new opportunity. Such a possibility may be not wholly bad if it releases new sources of financing for film-making, albeit sponsored by cigarette manufacturers, baby product companies and distilleries. Indeed, such sources of finance have been finding their way into film production for many years now, but hitherto only on the basis of risk investment, with few or no product advertising benefits. New deals beginning to emerge in the burgeoning video business are being structured, financially, in this way—with, for example, a major arts series partly sponsored, partly pre-sold to UK television, partly pre-sold to US cable TV and attracting a little risk investment too. In the future, anything goes, and the formal structures of Hollywood, Wardour Street and the cinema exhibitor business will cease to have any significance or strength.

If the scenario painted so far really does emerge with this balance, putting the real power into the hands of the viewer,

'We have yet to witness the party political videocassette, or the anti-semitic, anti-black, anti-white or anti-establishment, but no doubt in time they will become available.'

making him for the first time in moving picture history as influential as the producer and the distributor, a metamorphosis will be inevitable. It begins with the distributor of programmes acquiring a more direct link with his audience: a more sensitive awareness of what is good and what is bad. With broadcasting and the cinema in the UK effectively distributive duopolies, it can be hardly claimed that there has been much chance for experiment and sensitive feedback in determining what the public really wants.

Thus a much wider and vastly differing range of material should become available, perhaps unparalleled in the history of the cinema and television. An early pointer to this is the deal established by a new British company, Covent Garden Video Productions, by which all the Royal Opera House's normal performances can be distributed as videocassettes or discs. This is only a hint of the potential. The widening range of choice and accessibility could be accompanied by a new kind of fluency in the use of images. With the video disc especially, a totally different visual grammar will emerge, based not simply on the moving picture, the cut, and concepts of Pudovkin and Eisenstein, but on the viewer's control over the images.

Anyone who has sat down at a cutting bench with a Steenbeck or Moviola will know, instinctively, what this really means. Controlling movement, action, scene relationships and thousands of still pictures on a roll of cine film is an extraordinary and satisfying aspect of the film-maker's art. Giving the viewer an opportunity to participate in that experience is something entirely new (although at Expo 67, the Czechoslovakians did give cinema audiences a chance to vote, by remote electronic control, on the choice of alternative developments in a story line). It is difficult to imagine where this cultural change will take us. Perhaps the idea of multimedia—an ugly term that has been fashionable in recent years—will take on a new meaning as words, music, still pictures and moving pictures all become an essential and total part of a new style of programme making.

One video disc programme already under development, giving some insight into the change, is concerned with painting. Part of the disc will contain a huge encyclopedic store of hundreds of colour still pictures of paintings, many of them old works never seen before because galleries simply don't have the exhibition space to show all their collections. Other parts of the disc will contain

more conventional moving picture sequences relating to the still pictures; there will be, additionally, 'pages' of printed text on separate frames, giving biographical notes on the painters, information on the galleries. Encoded into the programme will be further optional information as teletext captions, plus alternative soundtracks on the stereo channels.

A similar concept has been worked out by the UK publishing house of Mitchell Beazley (recently bought by American Express particularly to provide Amex



Filming at the Tate for Britain's first programme intended for disc release.

with a vantage point in the video industry). Mitchell Beazley's printed encyclopedia *The Joy of Knowledge* was planned, right from the beginning, to integrate with video disc modules to be published later.

We may also find that semiology for the film student takes on a new dimension. For most people involved in film studies, the experience and the research is based on normal viewing at the intended speed of projection. Yet the director and editor never assembled the films that way in the first place. Is there here a new insight for the auteur school, perhaps enabling it to sharpen up some of its theories? At Nebraska University, they are now making video disc programmes which are interactive with computer programmes. If Shakespeare and Marlowe are amenable to computer analysis in validating authorship, why not Howard Hawks in trying to understand him better?

It may be that the video revolution is a matter for serious concern in some parts of the film industry. But its overall impact must be one of economic, political and cultural liberation. The past of Hollywood will re-emerge from the archives, accessible to all, and the future could have a stability that comes only with maturity. After all, in the history of the media, 80 years of film is a mere page, a subliminal image. And on optical video discs, the cinema can last and not fade away in a puff of cellulose nitrate smoke. ■

TOKYO STORIES

Kurosawa and Oshima interviewed on their recent films by Tony Rayns

Strange days in the Japanese cinema. A little over a decade ago, it would have seemed almost unthinkable to bracket together the directors of *Dodes'kaden* and *The Man Who Left His Will on Film*. The conjunction still seems slightly bizarre, but whatever their ideological and aesthetic differences Kurosawa and Oshima find themselves in situations now that are much closer together than ten years ago. Both have 'retired' from filmmaking for years at a time, both have used foreign finance to make films in Japan, and Kurosawa has become, in his way, as outspoken a critic of the Japanese film industry as Oshima ever was.

The fundamental thing that the two directors have in common is their status as 'outsiders' in their own industry. Even a cursory glance at the mainstream of current Japanese production quickly reveals why. Domestic productions cling precariously to their 50 per cent share of the Japanese box-office (they dipped below that figure for the first time in the late 1970s), but the production policies of the four surviving 'majors' have never been so conservative. Each sticks doggedly to one or two proven formulas. Toei, for example, since the decline of *yakuza* films, has churned out series like Suzuki Norifumi's *Truck Guys* (with Sugawara Bunta as a tough trucker with

a heart of gold)*, and spearheaded its assault on the market with a few cut-rate historical epics each year. (One of the latter, Nakajima Sadao's *The Shogun Assassins*, made in 1979, tried to steal a march on *Kagemusha* with a story of the use of doubles in the clan wars of the early 17th century; the result, however, owed considerably more to Japanese comic strips and the influence of Spielberg's *Close Encounters* than to the Kurosawa tradition.) And Shochiku, kept alive through its leanest years by Yamada Yoji's *Tora-san* series, now banks everything on mystery thrillers and sentimental melodramas (most of the latter also directed by Yamada, optimistically touted by the company as sole inheritor of the Ozu tradition).

The only real initiatives in the commercial sector have come from newcomers like Kadokawa Haruki, a prosperous publisher of pulp fiction, whose lists include Yokomizo Seishi's novels about the eccentric, dandruff-ridden private detective Kindaichi, and a number of glamorously 'international' potboilers by Morimura Seiichi. Kadokawa judged (rightly) that heavily promoted film-plus-book 'packages' along American lines would reactivate the steadily dwindling market. His aggressive initiative has incidentally provided journeyman work for Ichikawa Kon (*The Inugami Family*, *Hell's Gate Island* and other Yokomizo adaptations), but it has thrown up increasingly outlandish results since Sato Junya's ludicrous thriller-

*Names are given Japanese style, with the surname first.



'Kagemusha': the double (right) and his heir.

weepee *Proof of the Man* in 1977. However, Kadokawa's immense success has prompted a certain amount of other investment from sources outside the industry proper.

The Kitty Music Corporation weighed in with Jacques Demy's *Lady Oscar*, then went on to produce Hasegawa Kazuhiko's agreeably offbeat thriller *The Man Who Stole the Sun*—the latter, co-scripted by Paul Schrader's brother Leonard, a vehicle for the pop star Sawada Kenji, which casts him as a school physics teacher who manufactures an atom bomb in his kitchen. The Mitsukoshi department store co-financed Kobayashi's *Growing Autumn*. The Sokagakkai sect, ostensibly a Nishiren Buddhist organisation but with pronounced right-wing nationalist tendencies, secretly financed Moritani Shiro's *The Hakkoda Mountains*, a survival of the fittest military epic, although the corruption scandals that have recently rocked the sect make it unlikely that such investments will be repeated. And some of Japan's many TV companies have begun to experiment with involvement in film production, too.

Interventions like these from outside the industry have served to prop up the majors, each of which has its own circuit of theatres to fill. But they have not encouraged the majors themselves to take more risks in their own productions, nor have they paved the way for more serious independent productions to reach the cinemas. When Toei bought Yanagimachi Mitsuo's 16mm documentary about a motorcycle gang, *Black Emperor*, and blew it up to 35mm for theatrical release, it was the first time in the history

of the Japanese cinema that such a pick-up deal had been made. The success of the venture enabled Yanagimachi to make his first fiction feature, *A 19-Year-Old's Plan*, and get it shown. But other independent productions like Yokoyama Hiroto's *Jun* and Hidari Sachiko's *The Far Road* reached the international festival circuit long before any exhibitors in Japan agreed to run them. And the film recently voted to the top of the 1980 Ten Best list by the critics of the film magazine *Kinema Jumbo* (relegating *Kagemusha* to second place) had such difficulty in finding an opening that its director, Suzuki Seijun, resorted to exhibiting it himself in an inflatable dome that moved from site to site in Tokyo.

Suzuki's film, *Zigeunerweisen*, is basically a chamber piece for two couples; exhibitors were frightened off by its boldly non-naturalistic approach and unorthodox structure and imagery, but the public proved them wrong by flocking to the dome—a weekday afternoon screening that I attended, with the cinema parked on the roof of a department store, was packed. At the age of 57, Suzuki (a cult director among students for his *yakuza* films of the 1960s, lionised for his stand against Nikkatsu when the company tried to terminate his contract) has made a film considerably younger in spirit than anything that has lately emerged from Japan's best-known haven of 'alternative' cinema, the Art Theatre Guild. The ATG remains at best financially shaky, and the days when it would finance projects as 'uncommercial' as Oshima's *Death By Hanging* or Tera-yama's *Pastoral Hide-and-Seek* seem

long gone. It seems as if Higashi Yoichi's excellent *Boy Called Third Base*, made for ATG in 1978, has had the unfortunate side effect of prompting a suite of opportunistic variations on the themes of adolescent sexuality and psychological problems. The latest ATG release that I saw, Ohmori Kazuki's *Hippocrates-tachi*, ostensibly a comedy-drama about medical students, conforms to all the fundamental tenets of a Nikkatsu 'roman-porno' film: grotesquely male-oriented, it is as vulgar as it is emotionally shallow.

It is not hard to see why directors like Kurosawa and Oshima find it almost impossible to make films in this context. Imamura Shohei's return to feature filmmaking with *Vengeance Is Mine* in 1979 stands out as a solitary indication that the Japanese studio system may yet have a future. Although the notoriety of the subject (the real-life murderer Enokizu Iwao) undoubtedly helped sell the film, the seriousness of Imamura's approach could not be further from the soft porn, sentimentality and animated science-fiction that constitute the overwhelming bulk of the industry's annual production.

In the following interviews, conducted in Tokyo towards the end of 1980, both Kurosawa and Oshima voice their thoughts on this lamentable situation, as well as discussing their recent work and touching on their very different pasts in the industry. There is no polemic point behind the juxtaposition of the two interviews. Taken together, however, they offer a bleakly comprehensive analysis of the ailments besetting what was once one of the world's greatest film industries.

KUROSAWA

Whatever one thinks of *Kagemusha*—the Japanese critics were generally less indulgent about its weaknesses than their Western counterparts—the film is unmistakably a maverick project. Who but Kurosawa would have responded to the commercial failure of his first wholly independent film (and the bankruptcy of the directors' co-operative that produced it) by dogmatically insisting that his next project be the most expensive production ever undertaken in Japan? And, for that matter, opting to shoot a Mosfilm epic rather than a more obviously viable project at home? The film bears the marks of Kurosawa's intransigence: not just in the scrupulous insistence on historical accuracy, but also in the script's refusal to integrate the story of Takeda Shingen's double with the larger story of the fall of the Takeda Clan to produce a more conventionally unified dramatic structure.

I heard a story (possibly apocryphal) that Toho had specified in its contract with Kurosawa that he would make a film not exceeding three hours in length; the price it paid for this temerity was to have the director deliver a version lasting 2 hours, 59 minutes and 30 seconds for the Japanese release, prior to cutting twenty minutes from the 'international' version which was delivered to 20th Century-Fox.

The film tells three related but distinct stories: those of Takeda Shingen, of the kagemusha and of the Takeda Clan. One could imagine any one of them being the basis for a film in itself. How did you resolve the film's structure?

At the beginning, something very ambiguous comes into my mind as an idea; I let it mature by itself, and it goes into several specific directions. Then I go away somewhere to immerse myself in writing the scenario. It's less a matter of working within a defined structure than of letting myself be moved by the characters I've chosen to work with. I always try to start with the first scene. I myself don't know what direction it will take from there; I leave everything to the natural development of the characters. Even if my collaborator suggests that we should do something specific the next day, it never works out as foreseen. The spontaneous development of the characters is the most interesting part of the writing process for me.

In the case of *Kagemusha*, I was working on an adaptation of *King Lear* (which production costs have so far prevented me from turning into a film) and I was researching the Sengoku Jidai period (the clan wars of the late 16th century). I grew very interested in the Battle of Nagashiro, which remains a question mark in history. No one has satisfactorily

explained why all the *taisho* of the Takeda Clan should have died, while not one *taisho* of the Oda or Tokugawa Clans did. I started to consider ways of tackling this interesting question. It occurred to me that Takeda Shingen was known to have used many kagemusha (doubles), and I thought that by approaching the historical enigma through the eyes of one such kagemusha I might keep the subject to manageable proportions. Once I'd hit on the idea of making the kagemusha a petty thief, I had to consider how this man could become so immersed in the character of Shingen that he would actually 'become' him. I decided that it must be because of the strength of Shingen's own character. Then I reflected that the *taisho* who died in battle must also have been charmed or enchanted by Shingen. In effect, they committed suicide at Nagashiro—they martyred themselves for Shingen. They must have been in love with him, if you will.

Hence the three stories, or three strands of one story, evolved by themselves. It was never an intentional design.

How much is known about the actual character of Shingen?

It wasn't possible to get a very specific image: the way he looked and behaved is not recorded in the histories. But it was possible to get some impressions from his contemporaries' reactions to him, which are recorded. For example, Tokugawa Ieyasu had great respect for him: he wrote that he considered Shingen's *taisho* to be his equals in rank. Oda Nobunaga criticised Shingen a lot, but he must have respected him too, because he gave one of his relatives in marriage to Shingen's son Katsuyori. I'm sure that Nobunaga considered Shingen his most eminent rival. Also, it was possible to draw some conclusions from the motto that Shingen raised on his battle standards: 'Swift as the wind, silent as the forest, as sweeping as fire, as immovable as the mountain.' He took the words from the Chinese military strategist Sun Zi, which is interesting in itself.

You portray both Tokugawa and Nobunaga as much younger men than Shingen, which gives the film the general sense that something ends when Shingen dies, and something new begins with the victors... Is that why you cast new actors as the other clan leaders?

Historically, Shingen was about fifty-two, Nobunaga was about forty and Ieyasu was in his thirties. There are several historical versions of Shingen's death: the one I used in the film has him shot by a sniper, while others have him dying of tuberculosis or some other disease. I thought it would be more interesting to have him die in good health. Had Shingen lived and captured control of Kyoto (and hence Japan), Japanese history would assuredly have been very different. Once Nobunaga ruled the country, he was assassinated, and it was only then that Japan came into the hands of the Tokugawa family. It was a fateful moment in Japanese history. It is clear that Nobunaga was a genius, a much more 'modern' man than the average

Japanese of that time. According to the missionaries, Nobunaga knew that the earth was round, and was well informed about the world situation. He was also an active importer of new objects and ideas from abroad. That was the sort of personality that defeated the Takeda Clan. Of course, we cannot be sure that Nobunaga would have continued like that if Shingen had lived on...

I cannot say that I deliberately set out to show the transition from the older world to the newer, but since I was interested in the personalities of Nobunaga and Ieyasu (or at least in Ieyasu in his youth), I gave them some emphasis in the film. They stood in contrast to Shingen's son Katsuyori. I chose the actors to play Nobunaga and Ieyasu partly because their faces resembled the descriptions we have of the actual historical persons, and partly to create a fresh image of the characters. Had I used stars in those roles, I think they would have created an obstruction for the audience. It would have been different if I'd shown only Nobunaga or Ieyasu as the central character in a film, but since their appearances in *Kagemusha* are relatively few and brief, I used new faces to create an immediate strong impression. Furthermore, Ryu Daisuke and Yui Masayuki are very talented actors!

Katsu Shintaro (best known for his role as the blind swordsman Zatoichi) was originally scheduled to play Shingen. Did your conception of the character change when you cast Nakadai Tatsuya?

I had a fixed image of Shingen. Katsu Shintaro didn't understand what I wanted, there was an 'incident', and he left the production. So it was not a case of the character changing with the casting, but of Nakadai giving me what I wanted. When I direct a film, I need to

have actors who can follow my directions.

Turning away from *Kagemusha* for the moment, can you describe the Japanese film industry's apprenticeship system as you experienced it in the 30s?

People sometimes speak of 'apprenticeship' as a characteristic of the Japanese film system, and there may be some directors who experienced their training as such, but in my case it was emphatically not so. In the 30s, I did work as assistant to Yamamoto Kajiro, but I was completely free to do whatever I wanted. Our relationship was less that of a teacher and pupil than that of elder and younger brothers. Yamamoto's greatness was that he tried to accept all sorts of talents. At that time, the PCL company itself was very small (*Kurosawa gestured towards the Toho Studio buildings outside the window*)—only two buildings over there, and very little ground space. The company's policy was to regard assistant directors as cadets—a kind of elite-to-be. Assistants were supposed to involve themselves in every stage of production; then they would be promoted to chief assistant, whereupon they were supposed to learn leadership, how to guide a team in one direction. A chief assistant had to do every imaginable kind of job, including that of producer.

There were two pillars in Yamamoto's training policy: scenario writing and editing. He considered that a good director must be a scenario writer too, and let me write a lot—scenarios were my main source of income. He also let me do a lot of editing; in the later part of his career, I edited almost all his films. That was immensely helpful to me.

When I worked as Yamamoto's chief assistant, I was especially impressed by his ability to direct actors—the way he'd tell them that such-and-such was right or



The end of the Takeda Clan.

wrong. I hardly noticed details of performance myself at the time, and began to think I lacked the capability or talent to become a director. Yamamoto reassured me. He pointed out that he'd written the scenario himself, and thus had a mental image of the whole thing—he could see it all clearly before he started. He said it was natural that I, as chief assistant, shouldn't notice such matters. I wasn't convinced at the time, but when I began directing myself, I found myself standing beside the camera saying things like 'Very good, go ahead' and so on. I suddenly realised that everything was very clear to me too.

You entered the film industry in a climate of militarism, and you began directing when Japan was actually at war. Do you think your career would have developed differently if the national situation had been different?

During the war years, I was mainly writing scenarios. I presented a lot of them to the company, but internal censorship was very strong, and many of my ideas were ruled out. It made me very angry, and I tried to put up a strong resistance. It was a long time before I succeeded in shooting *Sugata Sanshiro* (*Judo Saga*). I didn't enjoy those struggles at the time, but, looking back, I see that they were a good preparation for later struggles against the company's money-men.

There was no freedom of expression during the war. All I could do was read books and write scenarios, without having any real outlet for my own feelings. *Dersu Uzala* was one of the ideas that came to me then. Like other ideas, it underwent a process of fermentation and maturing, rather like alcohol. Those ideas exploded once the war was over. Looking back, they were happy days.

And were there problems with the US censors after the war?

The first American-appointed censor who came to supervise the company after the war was a very mean-spirited leftist. I was working on *The Men Who Tread on the Tiger's Tail* and he didn't report properly to the Occupation Forces, and so they took it that I was shooting something dubious. The finished film was banned from public showing because it was considered 'feudalistic'. But the next inspector was a more moderate man: he looked at the film, and couldn't understand why it had been suppressed. Finally it was shown.

What effect did these pressures have on the films made at the time?

This sounds paradoxical, but in one important way the military faction did play a role in advancing Japanese film during the war years. Before the war, the themes, settings and subjects of films were very limited. With the advent of the strong army and navy, the authorities wanted us to go into new areas—for example, they wanted us to make a film in the shipyards, which nobody had done before. But the trouble with the military was that they wanted to restrict expression: they only wanted films that would support their cause. However, the fact that we began to dare to move into new areas was good for the overall development of films in Japan.

Were there Japanese films that you remembered from your youth when you began directing?

I saw hardly any Japanese films when I was very young. It was only when I started training to become a director that I saw a lot of Japanese films, first silents, then sound films. There were many fresh and interesting Japanese

films in those days, and I learned a lot from them. But I was also very intrigued by the work of important foreign directors like King Vidor, Rouben Mamoulian and William Wyler; their films became an important basis of support for my life afterwards. And I absorbed a lot from the French avant-garde and the German expressionists.

How easy was it to reconcile your tastes for certain non-Japanese culture with a traditional Japanese upbringing?

It was a requirement at a certain level of society to learn about Western culture and civilisation. I believe, though, that foreign people make too much of this. I also studied the Japanese classics, ancient music and *noh* theatre—I've perhaps studied classical Japanese more than most people in my country. But nobody makes any mention of all that. I think I was able to harmonise the two strands without any contradiction.

Perhaps people don't mention your classical education because they take it for granted from your films...

Japanese traditional culture was promoted very strongly during the war, and so there were many opportunities then for me to be exposed to the traditional arts, from theatre to painting. During those war years, when directors weren't really allowed to say anything, we used to get together to construct *haiku* poems to relieve our frustration. It's funny to look back at it, but in fact that was very helpful too. After the war, when we were free to do anything, I sat down one day to write *haiku* again, and found that I couldn't. *Haiku* can only be constructed through concentrated effort, and it was a great help to me to learn this the hard way. I think that the only way to make a successful film is to apply the same kind of very concentrated interest in one thing.

Did the success of *Rashomon* at Venice affect your position at home?

It made a tremendous difference. After *Rashomon*, I shot *Scandal* and then *The Idiot*. The latter was so badly received by the critics (some of whom are still writing today) that I had a lot of difficulties. I was scheduled to make a film for the Daiei company, but they cancelled it because of the reception that greeted *The Idiot*. Since I was living close to the Tama River at the time, I thought I wouldn't do much of anything except go fishing. So I went fishing one day, and my line broke. In our culture, that seems like a bad omen—I thought one bad thing would follow another. I cycled back home, and my wife came out to greet me, saying 'Congratulations'. I was in no mood to be congratulated for anything. Then she explained about *Rashomon*'s prize at Venice. The film had been entered in the festival without my knowledge. After its win, all the companies came rushing to me, asking me to make films for them. Had I not won the prize, I would have been forced to remain silent for a considerable time. Thanks to *Rashomon*, I was able to go on to make *Ikiru* (Living).



Kurosawa (right) directs Nakadai Tatsuya in 'Kagemusha'.

After that, was it your deliberate policy to alternate *jidai-geki* and *gendai-geki* [period and contemporary subjects]?

Nothing I do is 'intentional' in that sense. Everything comes very naturally. If I make a heavy, serious film, then afterwards I want to make something light, which anyone can enjoy. For example, after *The Lower Depths*, I made *The Hidden Fortress*. It's almost a biological need on my part. Whatever film I make is what I want to do at that moment.

What prompted your partnership with Kinoshita, Kobayashi and Ichikawa in the Yonki-no-kai Company?

We wanted to form a group to become the 'nucleus' of Japanese film. We wanted to make films without having to fight for them at every step. We set out quite idealistically, thinking that if we added D'Artagnan to the Three Musketeers, we'd have Four Musketeers (Yonki-no-kai). We thought it was a way to rescue Japanese cinema. The association foundered on the fact that we all had strong individual personalities. As you know, the only film the company produced was *Dodes'kaden*.

Why did it take you ten years to make another film in Japan, after the failure of Yonki-no-kai?

The main reasons were financial. The Japanese companies all became fairly inactive, and none of them would allow me to make the films I wanted to make. I don't believe this decline is attributable to TV; I think there is a fundamental difference between TV and the cinema. It takes a certain amount of confidence to produce films for the cinema, 'film-films' as it were. What the Japanese companies are producing are copies of TV. I don't find it surprising that audiences prefer to stay at home and watch these things on TV. What would make them travel to the cinema and pay money at the box-office? A very good film. Making real films seems to me the only way to win the battle with TV. The film industry has become too defensive. It's time to take the offensive.

How would you compare your ambitions for Yonki-no-kai with the efforts of young directors today, who work for organisations like the ATG?

In our case, it wasn't so much that we faced enemies as that we wanted to make good films. Unless we made good films, we wouldn't be able to wage a war. The young directors today are working like that because they have no alternative. More favourable conditions should exist for them. The requirements given to young directors in the independent sector are too similar to those given by the established companies. Budgets are too limited, and the organisations are essentially profit motivated. It's bad for young people to have to work in such adverse conditions.

But I also feel there's a problem about the attitude of some of the young directors. They feel that they have to make a more 'abrasive' type of film in order to attract audiences, or they make films motivated only by their own personal

interests. I don't think those are the ways to attract audiences. On the other hand, the only thing that all film directors have in common with the film companies is a concern for the size of the audience. In other words, although it may not be our intention to make a lot of money from our films, we do want to make films that will be seen by as many people as possible.

For the record, can you outline how *Kagemusha* was eventually financed?

I was in America for the Oscar ceremonies when I met George Lucas and Francis Coppola. They approached me, and said that they'd learned a lot from my films. Lucas, in particular, said that he would like to assist me in any way he could. At the time, I was trying to negotiate terms for the *Kagemusha* project with Toho, and we had reached a virtual standstill. Since it was the first time I had met them, I couldn't tell them that I was lacking money for a project. But someone must have mentioned my problem to them, because they went to 20th Century-Fox and persuaded Alan Ladd Jnr to invest in the film in return for the rights outside Japan. The amount that Toho were willing to put up was not adequate to make the film, and Fox came forward with the balance.

The Japanese film industry has always projected profits on the basis of domestic box-office grosses alone. I believe that we should also be taking account of the world market. Since *Kagemusha* is the first instance of a foreign company investing in a Japanese production, I've been willing to tour around Paris, New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco with the film, promoting it. I've made these efforts in the hope that this can be a stepping-stone for the rescue of Japanese cinema from this disastrous lack of confidence in the abilities of film directors to attract an audience.

What do you see as the international possibilities for Japanese film?

I believe that film is one of the best ways to help foreign countries understand Japan, and vice versa. I don't think Japan is very well understood as yet—a TV series like *Shogun* wouldn't be made if it were. I'm sure there will be more instances of co-productions with other countries. I think it's important to establish a kind of global film culture. Marx wanted workers to unite, I want film directors to unite! That's the kind of effort we film directors should be making...

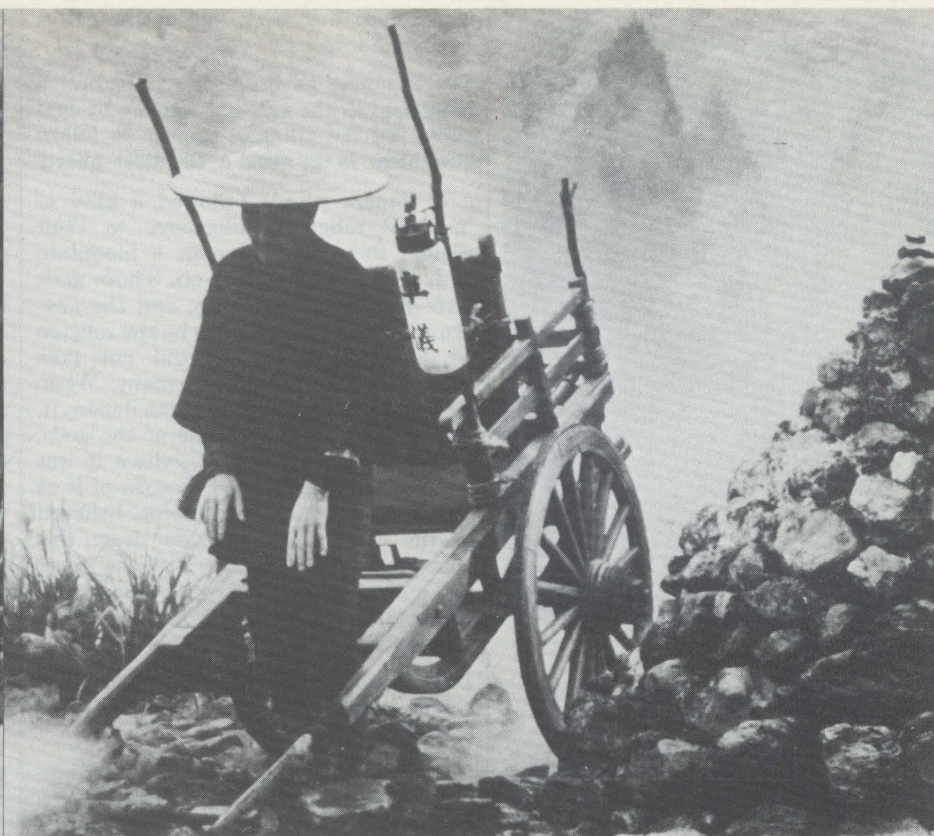
Basically, the present situation is chaotic, and nobody knows what direction the Japanese film industry will take. Non-film companies are proving increasingly ready to invest in film production. After all, they spend a great deal of money on advertising, and they must feel that getting their brand name up there on a cinema screen at the front of a feature is worthwhile. But the attitude of the established companies remains terribly passive. If they really don't believe in the power or the profitability of films, then I think they should withdraw from the film industry entirely.

OSHIMA

On the morning I talked with Oshima, the Japanese newspaper headlines were full of a hideous incident that had occurred the day before: five young members of the Kakumaru (Revolutionary Marxist Faction) had been bludgeoned to death with hammers by ten members of the Chukaku (Middle-core Faction), in broad daylight, on a public street near the Senzoku Library. This extreme example of continued internecine feuding within the Left inevitably brought to mind the spectre of Oshima's film on the subject, *Night and Fog in Japan*. In the twenty years since he made that film (his last for Shochiku, before going independent), Oshima has shifted the political emphasis of his work, if not its direction. He remains compulsively drawn to the subjects of crime, violence and sexuality, but his approach has become markedly less dispassionate, less analytic. As he has said, 'Now I have reached the stage where I like to expose the viewer to the naked reality of sex and of crime.'

This shift in strategy can doubtless be related to Oshima's impatience with the mood of conservatism that has swept Japan at least as strongly as any Western country. Unlike Kurosawa, Oshima does not blame the film industry for the present sorry state of Japanese cinema: in his view, the companies have merely exercised the standard capitalist reflex of retrenchment in the face of rising costs and shrinking audience figures. As his remarks below suggest, Oshima is more concerned by the decline in the quality of audiences than by the drop in their quantity.

These observations throw an interesting light on the two films that Oshima co-produced with the French company Argos Films, *Ai no Corrida* (*In the Realm of the Senses*, but the literal



translation is *Corrida of Love*) and *Ai no Borei* (*Empire of Passion*, literally *Ghost of Love*). Both deploy graphic representations of sexual and criminal violence to produce an awareness of areas that *cannot* be represented. The imaginary looms large in both, as an oblique presence and, more strikingly, as a prominent absence. Sada's fantasies (one of the least remarked elements in discussions of *Ai no Corrida*) trigger a series of open questions about female sexuality; the visions of Gisaburo's ghost that spread through the community in *Ai no Borei* implicitly propose a kinship between the 'private' phenomenon of sexual guilt and more 'public' social taboos that are arguably as basic. Perhaps the level of Oshima's engagement with his audience has changed, but the provocative thrust of his work remains vital.

At the same time, the interrelationship between the two films seems to have a dialectic force: it is as if *Ai no Borei* were the 'counter-film' to *Ai no Corrida*. Oshima himself proved reluctant to rationalise the 'hidden' dialectic, but the pattern of oppositions runs very deep. *Corrida* is structured on a principle of revelation, while *Borei* proceeds through one concealment after another. *Corrida* shows ubiquitous female onlookers in the scenes of love-making, while *Borei* shows a solitary (and frustrated) male voyeur. *Corrida* closes with the 'authoritative' voice of a male narrator, while in *Borei* the narrator is an old woman (Oshima: 'a woman whose face would be deeply lined—lines as deep as the furrows of the earth'). It is tempting to read *Borei* as—among other things—Oshima's sardonic comment on censorship, bearing in mind both the reception that *Ai no Corrida* met with around the world and the fact that Oshima was being prosecuted in

Japan for publishing the (decorously illustrated) script-book of *Ai no Corrida* as he made it.

When we spoke, Oshima was in the throes of preparing his next film, an adaptation of Laurence van der Post's novel *The Seed and the Sower*, about a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp in Java in the Second World War. Originally mooted as another co-production with a Western company, it is now to be financed with money from one of the majors and from Japanese TV. Oshima had finished his original script and was having it translated into English, prior to casting the English roles in the picture.

In retrospect, what do you think is the chief relationship between your last two films?

Let me first say that there is one important difference between these two films and the other films I've made: the women in them have a more objective existence. There are two reasons for this. One is that I have reached the age, as an artist, when I think more about women; the other has to do with the time we live in—the fact that the power of women has increased considerably in the 1970s. All my films have focused on crimes. But these two films in particular have focused on crimes committed by women: killing their men. The difference between *Ai no Corrida* and *Ai no Borei* is that the former dealt with a sexual relationship between a man and a woman, while the latter enlarged that theme to take in a social perspective. It's a big difference.

Is there a particular reason why both films are historical? Most of your films have been set in the present.

Again, there are two answers. First,

when you consider the subject of sexuality in a contemporary context, there are many complications and incidentals that you have to take into account. It is possible to examine the subject in a purer light in a historical context. Second, there was more oppression of sexuality in the past, and this had the effect of making private sexuality freer.

I feel that modern men and women have lost their sexual identity. The women depicted in my films were not influenced by Western ideas about sex; they approached their own sexuality in a very Japanese way.

Did you deliberately intend *Ai no Borei* to reverse some of the motifs in *Ai no Corrida*? Does the second film incorporate your reaction to the reception of the first?

Every director experiences the impulse to make the opposite of his previous film. After *Ai no Corrida*, I felt impelled to go outdoors... I treasure that kind of feeling. At the same time, *Ai no Corrida* was a very 'shocking' film, and it attracted a lot of attention around the world. The fact that it was generally well received didn't make me want to make the next film similar. On the contrary, the success made me more cautious—aware that I should not take advantage of what happened around *Ai no Corrida*.

I know that the basis of *Ai no Borei* was a story you found in a biography of the novelist Nagatsuka Takashi [a writer of the late Meiji period, broadly comparable with Zola]. Does the film relate to Nagatsuka's writings?

Nagatsuka was a pioneer realist, who depicted rural life in his books. He described the lives of peasant farmers in a very delicate way. He was also a poet. The incident that *Ai no Borei* was based



'Ai no Corrida'.

on happened in a village near the one in which Nagatsuka lived. He intended to use the incident as the basis for a mystery novel, but died before he could. His biographer Nakamura Itoko (who has some relationship with the Nagatsuka family) heard about the story, and incorporated it into her biography. The story has no direct connection with Nagatsuka himself, but I did read many of Nagatsuka's novels before making the film, to get a feeling for the times he lived in.

There are references to militarism in both films. To what extent did you want to inscribe the national situation into the subjects of the films?

Ai no Borei is set after the first war with China. Before that war, the power of the Japanese government was not much felt in the rural areas; the villagers' lives were very natural, remote from governmental oppression. After the war, however, as you can see from Toyoji's clothes in the film, state power began to impinge on the lives of the farmers. Before the war, too, there would have been no such thing as a village policeman. In *Ai no Corrida*, the power of the Japanese government is everywhere. Sada, in not giving in to its oppression, displays her strength, love and sexuality. In both films, however, I deliberately decided *not* to depict the society around the characters. I wanted to focus on the characters themselves, not on Japan as a whole.

Like all policemen in your films, the one in *Ai no Borei* is ridiculous, a figure of fun. Did you have any doubts about introducing such a figure into what is basically a serious story?

He was received as very comical by Western audiences, but it wasn't deliberately conceived as comedy. It was probably the actor who gave it that edge. I made him ridiculous because, in the end, I think it's more frightening that way. I wanted to depict the two men—Toyoji and the policeman—as having the same origins but having followed different paths, one joining the police and the

other becoming what you might call a martyr of love.

The Japanese government had instituted Shintoism as the national religion by that time. But the villagers appear to follow Buddhism. Is the ghost a 'Buddhist' ghost?

In Japan, people followed a kind of 'natural' religion, indigenous to their region: they would honour a mountain god, a river god and so on. Those gods were instituted as Shinto, and the government ruled that Shinto be the religion of Japan. The farmers did not take Shinto as one god, but as many. When Buddhism was introduced into Japan, it, too, was considered as one of the gods, indigenous to the regions where it was introduced. The farmers thought of it as one of their gods. They therefore believed in the ghost as a phantom from this spectrum. The appearance of the ghost has a close relationship with the Japanese tradition of greatly honouring one's ancestors.

Does the ghost's appearance not also relate to the tradition of Japanese ghost story films?

Ai no Borei does have some relationship with traditional ghost films. But the traditional films are mainly set in the Edo period, and the ghosts that appeared then had their origins in kabuki theatre. In kabuki plays, ghosts are depicted as though they come from China, and they appear in a spirit of revenge. They therefore relate closely to the ideology of *bushi-do*. But the ghost in *Ai no Borei* is a farmer's idea of a ghost, not a samurai's.

To turn to your next film, what attracted you to the project?

I think that war makes men into devils, brings out the demonic. In the Second World War, that was especially true of the Japanese. I'm interested in showing a British soldier who has some equivalent feeling, someone who matches the Japanese soldier. That's what attracts me most. There will be a lot of violent scenes, but the theme itself is not violent at all. It rather deals with what goes on inside the men. I think that in this film there will be a conflict between the gods inside the British soldiers and the gods inside the Japanese soldiers.

Is there any point of contact with your adaptation from Oe Kenzaburo's *The Catch*? [Oe's novella and Oshima's film deal with a black American airman who is taken prisoner by Japanese villagers in the closing stages of the war.]

In *The Catch*, the Japanese villagers consider their captive as a kind of demon, coming from somewhere completely unknown to them. They have no real conception of who or what he is. But in the new film, both sides know who each other are, and what each other thinks. I'm sure there is some underlying connection between the films, though.

What are the differences between the film-making situation in Japan now and the situation when you began directing?

Film-making here has become very

hard since the 60s. In the 60s, there were students and other young people who were interested in seeing serious films. In the 70s, the film industry lost that audience, and the general public looked for entertainment in films rather than seriousness. In the 70s, the public stopped pursuing any idea of revolution. That has altered the industry significantly.

There are now young directors who have begun to make very low-budget independent films, and the companies are starting to make use of them. But the audience is still looking for entertainment, and even these young film-makers are obliged to make 'entertainment' films. There remains the possibility that something more serious may emerge in the future. On the other hand, directors of my age who are under contract to the companies have no choice but to make what the companies want. They are puppets, in that sense.

How did you react to criticisms that your last two films 'betrayed' the radical thrust of your earlier work?

I think that kind of criticism is very superficial. In both *Ai no Corrida* and *Ai no Borei*, I sought to represent revolution through the depiction of women and of the underlying currents in society, not revolution through ideology alone.

I think that both capitalism and Marxism shared the goal of industrialising society, in the belief that this would make everyone happy. People are now realising that industrialisation does not bring happiness, even in the socialist countries. At present, we're at a stage where tensions are beginning to appear in areas like sexuality and ecology. But the movements associated with those areas of tension have not yet become one significant source of energy. They remain scattered and disparate.

Is that true throughout the Left in Japan? What about the murders yesterday—were they an isolated incident, or a symptom of larger problems?

It was an isolated incident. Japanese society as a whole has become highly conservative, and even young people do not believe in the possibility of revolution. The reasons are twofold. One thing is that everything has become much harder economically. The other is that the world's socialist countries don't seem to offer a viable model. People look at them and don't believe that there can be any such thing as a socialist revolution. In 1960, when I made *Night and Fog in Japan*, my hope was that the movements on the left would grow and strengthen. Now, as you can read in the newspapers today, only the worst has remained. The rest has vanished. Nothing has improved since the 1960s. ■

Author's thanks are due to many people, especially Ms Kato Chieko, Ms Nogami Teruyo, Ms Omori, Ms Kotohda Chieko, Ms Kawakita Kazuko, Mr Shimizu Akira, Mr Yamatani Tetsuo and Mr Nishimura Yuichiro. Parts of the Kurosawa interview originally appeared (in a different form) in Time Out No. 552.

DOUBLE TAKES

Here, in a new opinion column, QUINCANNON squares up to Lindsay Anderson and reflects on the cinema's first books, poems and paintings.

In a discussion on film criticism between Penelope Houston, Paul Rotha, Basil Wright and Lindsay Anderson published in the gleaming silver-covered 25th anniversary number of *SIGHT AND SOUND* (Autumn 1958), Anderson spoke of the 'terribly erratic and over-personal criticism' of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* writers, but felt it was somehow justified by the fact that several were just then directing their first films. He prompted this exchange:

ROTHA: 'I hope they will remember, as indeed I hope the generation that came out of *Sequence* will remember, to go on writing about films as well as making them.'

ANDERSON: 'I agree with you, but one's beginning to feel that it is a hopeless struggle.'

The *Sequence* writers who went into film-making—Gavin Lambert, Tony Richardson, Karel Reisz and Lindsay Anderson—did give up writing about the cinema, in roughly that order (though Lambert produced some estimable fiction about Hollywood and, much later, books on *Gone With the Wind* and George Cukor). This has been a major loss, and so when the curious incident of Lindsay Anderson barking in the night-time occurs we should sit up, take notice, and enjoy what he has to say.

One refers of course to his *Guardian* article (2 March 1981), headed, somewhat alarmingly, 'At the root of the cinema's problems is a critical betrayal'. This seemed to herald an important manifesto. Instead what followed was a vitriolic review article on Richard Roud's *Cinema: A Critical Dictionary*, James Monaco's *How to Read a Film*, and the first of the BFI's educational readers, *Realism and the Cinema* (the second volume in this series, incidentally, reprints a piece by Anderson on John Ford). This is a vigorous attack on the critical package made up of structuralism, semiology, Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis in the name of common-sense, clarity and humane values. It doesn't have much to do with the film industry, the parlous state of which has possibly helped to create this criticism, rather than been created by it.

But that is only where Anderson begins. He finishes up with an attack on film teaching, a very limited area in Britain about which little is known (and it's in need of ventilation and exploration rather than simple abuse and automatic defence). Within a sentence, his offensive has broadened into a condemnation of the 'indiscriminate proliferation' of higher education 'generously funded and inadequately supervised' and 'a spectacular misapplication of public money'. This is a careless intervention in a dangerous



area where careful distinctions need to be made if one is to avoid siding with Rhodes Boyson or the doctrinaire left. Anderson, whose essay in the 1957 symposium *Declaration* showed how presciently aware he was of the latent conservatism of Osborne and Amis, can think straighter than this.

His final sentence had the threatening ring of a Tory conference speaker: 'The stables need a good cleaning-out [sic]. Sooner rather than later.' It may be that this characteristic *Guardian* misprint should have read not 'cleaning-out' but 'cleaning-hour', a request for a little light academic housekeeping, as it were. Anyway, the article did not provoke anything capable of being dignified by the term debate, just the usual flurry of uninteresting letters from interested parties.

People not around in the 50s can have little idea of the impact Anderson's reviews and articles had, and the hopes that were invested in his future. In a recent study of 'Culture in the Cold War 1945-1960' called *In Anger*, Robert Hewison recognises Anderson's importance and the central significance of his essay on committed criticism 'Stand Up! Stand Up!' (*SIGHT AND SOUND* Autumn 1956), but he doesn't convey that peculiar combination of Orwell, Leavis and Scots dominie (a little Macaulay, a touch of Carlyle, a whiff of Knox, a strong dash of Jean Brodie) that made him so powerfully articulate a moral presence. At a party following the screening of Mike Todd's *Around the World in 80 Days* at the 1956 Cannes Festival, the words 'Lindsay didn't like it', spoken in ten languages and accents, passed through the room like a brushfire, consuming the film's reputation as they went.

Anderson was coming a little late to Richard Roud's *Critical Dictionary*, which had been published nearly a year before. (Indeed it is well known that throughout the 1980 Cannes Festival Roud cut stone dead a reviewer who had written far less harshly of his anthology than Anderson was to do.) He was, however, acting in a commendably disinterested fashion. For one of the longest, most adulatory pieces in the book is a fourteen column entry on 'Lindsay Anderson and Free Cinema', calling its

subject the only British director 'of any generation who immediately cuts an international figure, who can without apology or special pleading be considered in the same frame of reference as Pasolini or Jancsó or Ray.'

The contributor of this essay is John Russell Taylor, critic, author of numerous books on theatre and cinema, and currently art critic (and formerly movie reviewer) of *The Times*. What makes this piquant is that Anderson's 'Stand Up! Stand Up!' article was not, as Robert Hewison implies in *In Anger*, a seminal essay on commitment, but a clarification. It was written in response to a reader's letter published in the same issue from one 'J. R. Taylor' of Dover, criticising *SIGHT AND SOUND* reviewers (particularly Anderson and Walter Lassally) for the sentimental character of their committed writings. This was Taylor's first contribution to *SIGHT AND SOUND*, written, one infers from dust-jacket information, while studying Art Nouveau book design at the Courtauld.

Jots & landmarks

Pasolini and Ray (Satyajit) turn up in *Makers of Modern Culture*. Jancsó doesn't, nor does Lindsay Anderson, though there's an entry on Sherwood Anderson and references to Harriet, Bibi and Maxwell. What is/who are *Makers of Modern Culture*? Edited by Justin Wintle 'with more than 500 contributions from over 240 specialists in a wide variety of fields, *Makers of Modern Culture* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, £12.50) is the most comprehensive and informative book on twentieth-century ideas ever published,' says the blurb. The movie-makers included, in addition to Ray and Pasolini, are Bergman, Brakhage, Buñuel, Chaplin, Cocteau, Cukor, Disney, Eisenstein, Fellini, Ford, Godard, Griffith, Hawks, Hitchcock, Keaton, Lang, Losey, Polanski, Pudovkin, Renoir, Riefenstahl, Rossellini, Sirk, Truffaut, Vertov, Visconti, Sternberg, Wajda, Welles. There are no entries on Gance, Lubitsch, Murnau, Kurosawa, Mizoguchi, Ozu, Pabst, Stroheim, Vigo. There are inevitably—and it will get up Anderson's

DOUBLE

flaring nostrils—highly appreciative little pieces on Althusser, Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, Lévi-Strauss and Saussure. The choice of film-makers is inevitably fashionable and some contributors have trouble clinching the case for their subjects as cultural 'makers'. Lynda Myles (or 'Linda Miles' as she appears here) has to make some extravagant claims on behalf of Douglas Sirk to justify his position between George Simmel and C. H. Sisson.

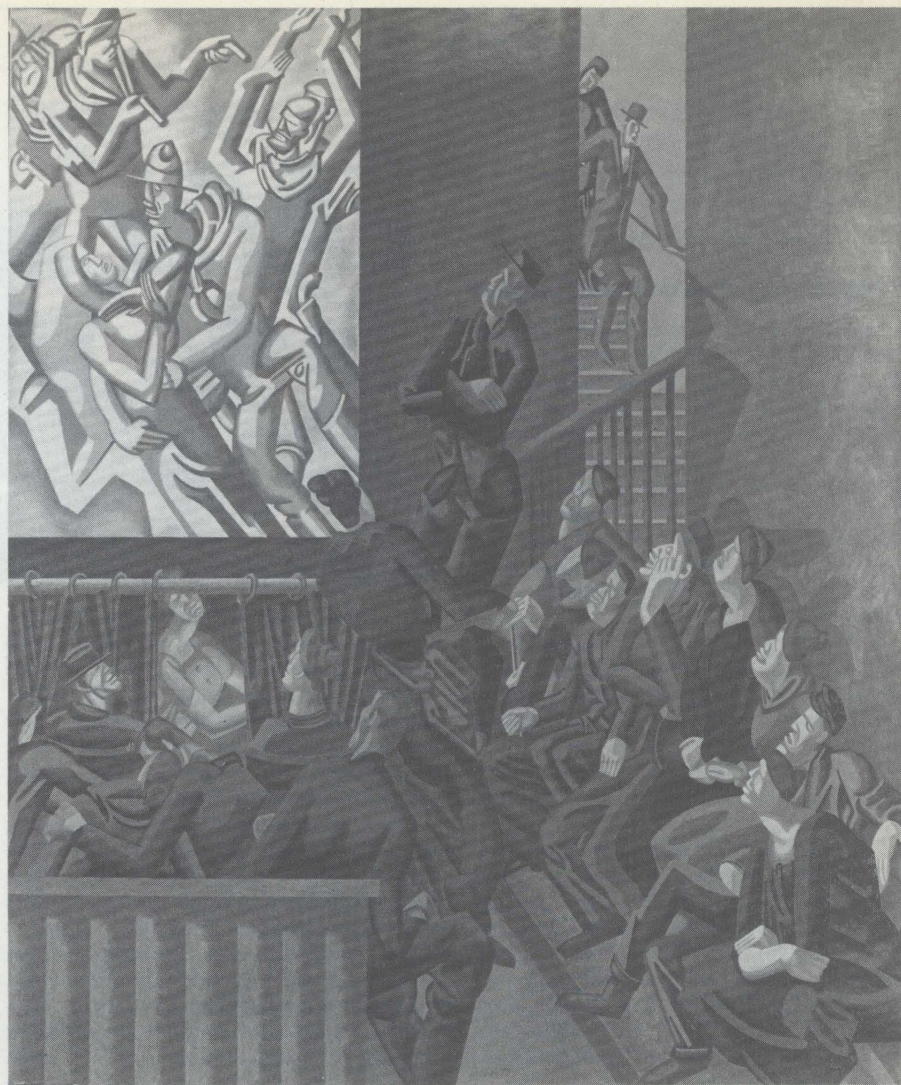
Another name missing from *Makers of Modern Culture* is René Clair, whose innovative activities in the avant-garde silent cinema and the early commercial talkies have been forgotten during the past two decades and insufficiently recalled by most obituarists. *Sous les toits de Paris* and *Le Million* were truly original works that influenced film-makers the world over and provided a particularly romantic notion of 'Frenchness' for two generations of British and American moviegoers. The Marx Brothers swiped a major gag from *Le Million* for *A Night at the Opera* and Chaplin borrowed shamelessly from *A nous la liberté* in *Modern Times*.

But Clair's movie career is bracketed by significant claims to originality that lie outside his actual pictures. In 1962, long after his major cinematic work had been done, he was the first film director to be elected to the Académie Française. Back in 1925, before he'd directed a feature or set foot in America, Clair wrote the novel *Adams*, a fantasy of America's greatest movie star Cecil Adams going crazy. (It was belatedly translated as *Star Turn* in 1935 by John Marks.) The novel has affinities with Kafka's *Amerika* (which only Max Brod had read at that time) and anticipated Nathanael West in its satire on mass credulity, the movies and pop religion.

The end of *Adams* also looks forward to the conclusion of clever modern novels like David Lodge's *Changing Places* that turn from prose fictions into films, and it touches on the ephemeral nature of film itself. After *Adams*' bodily death, lightning strikes the warehouse containing the negatives of the films that will ensure his cinematic immortality. "Fortunately," said Cecil's few remaining fans, "there are still some positives of his films about..." These copies also vanished. You are aware, of course, that a reel of film is the frailest of man's toys. Time withers and corrodes it. Thus there was nothing left of Cecil Adams' work. The emulsion, alas, peels away from the celluloid.

Film archives (and currently Martin Scorsese) have long been telling people this. Clair wrote it in 1925.

Clair's was perhaps the first novel of real quality about the cinema, though it was of course preceded by Leon Q. Wilson's comedy of Hollywood life *Merton of the Movies*. Kipling's great tale of 1904 'Mrs Bathurst' is generally thought of as the first major fiction touching on the cinema and probably still is, despite the fact that Patrick Robertson in his diverting *Guinness Book of Film Facts and Feats* comes



'The Cinema' (1920) by William Roberts. (Tate Gallery, London.)

up with an 1898 short story by Mrs Mansergh called 'An Idyll of the Cinematograph', about a private detective hired by both a fiancé (in India) and his fiancée (in London) to shoot covert film of their prospective spouses whom they haven't seen for years. The results shock both. From Robertson's account, this banal comedy is oddly enough rather like the tragic 'Mrs Bathurst' played as farce.

Robertson's *Guinness Book* doesn't go into the first poem about the cinema or the first painting. His discovery of 'An Idyll of the Cinematograph' should warn anyone off making claims about 'firsts' in either field. Vachel Lindsay wrote the first book on film aesthetics, *The Art of the Moving Picture* (1915), but did he write any poems about the cinema before then? If so, he got in before Sir Henry Newbolt's touching lines in *The War Films* about seeing Great War newsreels: 'O living pictures of the dead/O songs without a sound,/O fellowship whose phantom tread/Hallows a phantom ground.'

Certainly with the 1920s there came a flood of verse inspired by the cinema, most memorably Hart Crane's poem about Chaplin. What there haven't been are many poems about directors before Edwin Morgan's tributes to Godard, Antonioni and Kurosawa in the early 1970s, although Auden and MacNeice, in their jointly written 'Last Will and

Testament' in *Letters from Iceland* (1937), apostrophised their British movie-making contemporaries thus:

'We hope one honest conviction may at last be found
For Alexander Korda and the Balcon Boys
And the Stavisky Scandal in picture and sound
We leave to Alfred Hitchcock with sincerest praise
Of *Sabotage*. To Berthold Viertel just the script
For which he's waited all his passionate days.'

Pictureshows

The earliest painting of a cinema interior in a British gallery is William Roberts' *The Cinema* (1920) at the Tate, depicting his stylised futurist figures craning uncomfortably towards the sepia screen. Behind a half-drawn curtain a pianist accompanies the film. The movie is a Western, in which the protagonist wears a Boy Scout-style hat of the sort affected by William S. Hart. The location is not, as is commonly supposed, the Biograph, Victoria, but a long since defunct fleapit in Warren Street.

Margaret Priest has done some attractive small drawings and prints of the cinema interiors of East London, but the

Faces & secrets



'New York Movie' (1939) by Edward Hopper. (Museum of Modern Art, New York.)

only other really notable large-scale British painting of the inside of a cinema is by a pupil of Roberts' friend and fellow Great War artist Edward Bomberg—Frank Auerbach. His *Interior, Gaumont, Camden Town* of 1964 also has a Western on its bluish screen. But Auerbach's heavy impasto is not at the service of communal experience. His interest lies in the cavernous space, its size and weight, and the screen looks like a prehistoric cave painting lit by a guide's torch. The Gaumont, Camden Town was renamed the Odeon, then split into a Bingo hall downstairs and a cinema upstairs. The latter is now the Gate 3.

The title of greatest movie-house painting, however, is contested between Thomas Hart Benton and Edward Hopper. A section of a 1931 mural by Benton called *City Activities*, in the New School for Social Research, New York, has one vibrant segment of some entranced ladies looking at a movie gangster, who's kissing a girl while clutching a pistol behind her back. (Benton also painted the panoramic *Hollywood* (1937) that Leo Rosten used on the dustjacket of his *Hollywood: The Movie Colony*.)

Hopper's painting *New York Movie* (1939) hangs in the Museum of Modern Art, New York. It's based (so Gael Levin tells us in *Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist*) on sketches made by the inveterate moviegoer Hopper on visits to the Strand, Palace, Republic and Globe cinemas. The architecture is carefully rendered, but the film cannot be made out, the focus being on the usherette standing on the right of the picture, chin in hand, bored and out of sight of the screen. The artist's wife Jo posed in the hallway of the Hopper apartment as the usherette. That Hopper's painting diminishes the movie-going experience in a conventional fashion is arguable. But it remains probably the greatest movie painting. It is interesting to note that as a student at the turn of the century

Hopper attended art classes with Vachel Lindsay.

In discussing the provenance of *New York Movie*, Gael Levin comes up with formal resemblances to Degas pictures, and thematic connections with his American realist predecessors. 'His theatre and movie-house interiors,' she casually notes, 'are distinguished from those of other artists—for example, John Sloan's *Movies, Five Cents* of 1907—in that Hopper characteristically focused on the theatregoers' concentration, while Sloan was captivated with the lively interaction of the audience.' Were there so many early paintings of cinemas? This is a revelation of the kind one has in reading a contemporary review of *Little Caesar* or *Public Enemy* where the critic starts out declaring how fed up he is with gangster movies.

British gallery-goers who have never seen Sloan or Hopper will be acquainted with them through the movies. Ralph Woolsey based his lighting for *The Iceman Cometh* on the smoky, greeny-brown palette of Sloan, and Laszlo Kovacs drew on Sloan and his pupil George Bellows for the visually elegant (but otherwise worthless) *Paradise Alley*, which he photographed for Sylvester Stallone. Kovacs was influenced by Hopper generally in his lighting and framing of John Byrum's *Heart Beat*; at one point, Kerouac and Cassady stop at a rural filling-station, and there's a breathtaking re-creation of Hopper's 1940 painting *Gas*.

Now that we've at last seen a major Edward Hopper show at the Hayward Gallery, and a smaller show of drawings has toured in Scotland and Wales, British moviegoers can consider the interplay between Hopper and the cinema. His key follower in the movies is undoubtedly Walter Hill. Hill's *The Streetfighter* (known in America as *Hard Times*) and *The Driver* reproduce Hopper's existential world with astonishing fidelity and authenticity.

During the McCarthy era it was always said that the blacklisted actors were the worst sufferers because they couldn't do clandestine work, their faces were their misfortune. It isn't possible for actors, unless heavily disguised, to appear anonymously or under pseudonyms, and indeed only one performer who changed his name comes readily to mind. The young character actor David Wolfe was starting a useful Hollywood career in the early 1950s (his credits include Preminger's *Where the Sidewalk Ends* and Boetticher's *The Cimarron Kid*) when he fell foul of the witch-hunters. As Wolfe, he appeared with other blacklisted artists in the left wing film *Salt of the Earth*, directed by Herbert J. Biberman of the Hollywood Ten in 1954. He then changed his name to David Bauer, under which name he carved a new career in Britain, starting as Doc in the first British production of *West Side Story*, and subsequently getting small parts in dozens of films and TV plays, specialising in American officers, senators and so on. He died in 1973 while appearing at the National Theatre in *The Front Page*.

One only needs to look at movies to know 'who's who' among the actors. But what urgently needs doing, before all the trails get cold, is to establish the credits of all the blacklisted writers and directors during the 1950s. Delmer Daves, for instance, was told by Harry Cohn that the screenplay of *3.10 to Yuma* was by a man 'from down there' (i.e. in Mexican exile), but never discovered who wrote it. As late as 1969 Abraham Polonsky would not name the pictures he had worked on in the 50s for fear of compromising the colleagues whose names he used as fronts. There is an interesting subject for research here, on the face of it more valuable than most things you'll read in the eight pages of doctoral dissertations accepted between 1975 and 1980 listed in the first number of a new biannual publication, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*.

Edited by K. R. M. Short of Westminster College, Oxford, and published by Carfax Publishing Company, Dorchester-on-Thames, at £18 a year (half-price to personal subscribers), the *Journal* gets off to a good start with valuable pieces on the French cinema during the German occupation and the BBC's relationship with the Foreign Office and Nazi Germany during the 1930s. There's also the facsimile publication of a most revealing secret memorandum on international propaganda and broadcasting circulated in the Ministry of Information three months before the outbreak of World War II. Two of its 86 pithy points are:

22. 'No matter how innocent and free from controversy a story may appear, a film producer must handle it with kid gloves and walk on eggs until it is completed.'

23. 'The film cannot be effectively contradicted.'

QUINCANNON

Francis Cairns submits a tentative progress report on Herzog's latest venture...

Fitzcarraldo

I first met Werner Herzog in the spring of 1975, three days after he had walked from Munich to Paris. He still had about him the army clothes and the ill-fitting boots which he wrote of with such concentration and detachment in his record of the journey (*Of Walking on Ice*, Tanam Press, New York, 1980). This book—the 'preferred film' of Herzog—recounts the three aspects of the odyssey: the gruelling physical feat, the film he was to present in France, *Every Man for Himself and God Against All*, later retitled *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*, and the pilgrimage to visit Lotte Eisner, ill in hospital. The spiritual element triumphed: Miss Eisner was well again.

That Herzog is an explorer in an old tradition is well known, and is not perhaps the most interesting attribute of his artistic personality. His stated objective is to show things on the screen that have never been seen before, and to break with an entire modernist tradition of image-making. The travels are Promethean in scope: the Andes of *Aguirre*, the Carpathians of *Nosferatu*, the Crete (and the windmills) of *Signs of Life* are an integral part of this purpose and of the authentic strangeness and originality of his films. The visions of Hias at the beginning of *Heart of Glass* came from Herzog's lone journey, with Volkswagen and Arriflex, to Wyoming, Utah, and Alaska. Now, backed with American co-financing for *Fitzcarraldo*, he has returned to Peru.

Fitzcarraldo must surely bring some spectacular elements of film-making to their imaginable limits: enormous, costly, problem-beset; two and half years in preparation and shooting to date; an extraordinary story of a nineteenth century 'rubber baron' of the Amazon; more extras than *Cleopatra*; the production halted and the film effectively restarted twice. Analogies with *Aguirre* (small-scale and picturesque in comparison), with von Stroheim's *Greed*, with Dennis Hopper's *The Last Movie*, are no doubt being widely made.

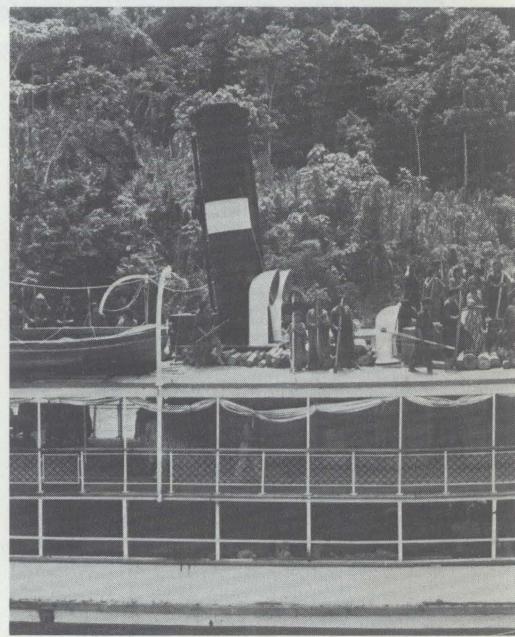
When Herzog was finishing *Nosferatu the Vampyre* in 1978, his team were already in Peru preparing the boats of *Fitzcarraldo*. 'The initiative for the film,' he explained in an interview, 'came from Joe Koechlin, who was one of those who helped me out of my financial impasse in 1972, when we were making *Aguirre*. Koechlin came to see me in Munich to propose the idea of returning to Peru and making another film. The story of *Fitzcarraldo* as such did not interest me, but there was one detail which was fascinating: this man transported a boat from the Ucayali river to the Madre-de-Dios

river. He divided it into three parts and had it carried across the mountain, which took seven or eight months. From this point of departure, I invented the story of a man who wants to bring opera into the jungle; he will do absolutely anything to make Caruso come to Iquitos. It's a fantastic story, a bit like *One Hundred Years of Solitude*...

Preparation advanced and the company, Wildlife Films Peru S.A., was formed, with Walter Saxer as production manager. In a Herzog production, the story has it that all functions in the unit are duplicated—not only camera and sound crew but costume and scene designers as well. Conditions are so arduous that one crew member is likely to be out of action at any one time.

Herzog studied survey maps, aerial charts and satellite pictures, and found his ideal location: Waiwam, a village situated between the Alto Marañon and the Cenepa rivers, and inhabited by the Aguaruna Indian tribe of the Jivaro family. (It was these tribes who suffered cruelly—indeed, were decimated—at the hands of Fitzcarraldo himself, and he still survives in their own oral tradition and myth.) When the company moved in, in July 1979, the Aguarunas protested, through their official body, the Consejo Aguaruna y Huambisa, to the Peruvian government. They refused to co-operate as extras in the film; and claimed that the company had no right to be on their territory. (The Indian tribes of Peru have a high degree of autonomy over their tribal lands.) The Indians could not see why anyone should want in any case to make a film about this hated man; they disliked everything about it, even the necessity of changing their dress and hair. The situation deteriorated very rapidly; the Aguarunas became increasingly enraged, Herzog maintained that he had acted correctly, had broken no law, and had received official permission from the Peruvian Ministry of Agriculture. The Peruvian government were in the ambiguous position of either having authorised the company (thereby violating their own agreements with the Indian community), or of not agreeing officially but of turning a blind eye to the activities of Wildlife Films.

The resulting debacle, with the destruction of the company camp at Waiwam (not without its humorous elements, it seems—more with warpaint and determination than with any real harm done) has been widely reported, and Herzog was attacked in the press all over the world. Everyone had his piece to say—ethnologists, sociologists, Survival International, commentators speaking of



Above: on location in Peru (photos Sygma).

cultural rape, the camera replacing the gun, the 70 HP outboard motor the canoe, and so on.

As far as the Aguarunas were concerned, Herzog readily concedes that they behaved with dignity and integrity throughout. Although the twentieth century, in the form of transistors and t-shirts, not to speak of missionaries and anthropologists in succession, has already reached them, the sense of identity remains. The tribe only appoints a chief in time of war; and the war was on. They did not however accuse the enemy of ethnocide or of cultural invasion (and Herzog, on his side, never intended to make an ethnographical film on the community).

Herzog retired to Munich to reflect. He had explained, at press conferences in Lima and in Hamburg, his desire to do one thing only: to make the film. (At the Hamburg conference, he was 'put on trial' by a group of left-wing journalists for 'endangering the human species'!) He maintained the correctness of his



Above: Mick Jagger (*Sygyta*); top right: Herzog in the Pyrenees (Claude Chiarini).

approach, seeing it as a straightforward commercial negotiation. Further, the Indians were offered not only additional inducements such as medical posts, but also a more active part in the shooting and in the scenario and the decors.

We went to see Herzog in early 1980, in Munich, cold, rainy and melancholy. He did not want to co-operate on an article at that time '... All this wild stuff flying around ... I just let it blossom, let it grow. The media are like horses or pigs—every so often they need to make a big stink—then someone opens a window and the smell goes away. In Holland, you know, I'm known as the man with the grey rats ...' [from *Nosferatu*]—'What happened to the rats?' 'We ate most of them!'

'No, I've done nothing wrong in Peru. There have been agitators there, people with political motives ... I've never met them, there were French people there, Cubans too. And I was there, so I know what happened. If you were not there, you don't know anything. It's like the

man who discovered Niagara Falls. No one would believe him—the only proof was in his having seen it.

'There is no one voice for the Aguarunas, in spite of what people say. Even in a village of three hundred souls, there is no such thing as one voice—there are too many conflicting forces. The Aguarunas proclaim their solidarity with the Machiguengas [another tribe to the south, near Cuzco, close to the ground of the original Fitzcarraldo], but they have never seen each other, they live hundreds of miles apart. The jungle is a mixture—of Indians, missionaries, government people, the military. They have kept their integrity; and I have respected the Law of Protection of Indian Territories. In the jungle there is no authority, except for the military, and that is only for a few hundred metres around the army posts. The jungle has its own life, which has nothing to do with the rest of the order, the establishment. Settlers who come in from the altiplano will have to adapt, or leave. The jungle will

re-assert itself. It's like a girl in Munich wearing a bikini: it won't take her long to decide what to do.

'So I'm leaving my hand in the game, but I'm not playing anything, I'm not moving it.'

Herzog talked more about the central character of the film, about his passion for art and lyric opera and his desire to bring these to a savage universe. (I myself subscribe to the romantic notion that there is always a secret reason for making a film, but I was not able to guess it.) Herzog, gentle and soft-spoken, once told me that he had no irony in him. While sceptical of that, I am convinced that there is nothing of the Machiavelli or the intriguer. One of his (largely unseen) short films was entitled *Precautions Against Fanatics* (1969, 11 mins). We talked of other things—of directors (Griffith is the one he acknowledges), of different cultures and places to live. He prefers, after his native Bavaria, Ireland and then Algeria. 'What do they have in common?' 'Nothing. I like them.'

Herzog spoke of his Australian film project, abandoned because of the death of the man for whom it was written, an Aborigine of about 75 years of age. The film was to be named *Where the Green Ants Dream*. Herzog pulled out a blue folder from under a pile of documents: the script. 'This is my blue dream.'

During the last year, he has been making *Fitzcarraldo* in Peru, with Jason Robards as Fitzcarraldo, Mick Jagger, and Claudia Cardinale. It was shot in many places, mainly Iquitos and Manaus, with as extras local people from around Iquitos. Werner Schroeter was engaged to film the opera scenes, at first planned to be shot in Brazil, now changed to Italy. In March, Robards left the film because, it was reported, of illness. Herzog, faced with having to re-shoot almost all the film, replaced him with—Klaus Kinski. Now the entire team have disappeared into the jungle again, and *Fitzcarraldo*, if Herzog's marvellous dream does not run away with him, will at last be made. The Indians are, no doubt, already creating myth upon myth. ■

ROBERT ALTMAN: BACKGAMMON AND SPINACH

TOM MILNE looks beneath the surface of the 'successful' *Popeye*; **ROBERT ALTMAN**, in an interview, discourses on games and the vicissitudes of film-making; and **RICHARD COMBS** disinters the 'lost' *Health* . . .

If there is a dominant Altman motif beneath the persistent style, it is probably the way his characters, most notably in films like *McCabe and Mrs Miller*, *The Long Goodbye* and *Quintet*, are perennially frustrated by inimical social environments in their fumbling attempts to win through to (or preserve) a kind of personal truth or honesty. In this sense, *Popeye* is the positive developed from a long line of Altman negatives.

It begins, after a brief excerpt from one of the old Max Fleischer cartoons and laconic glimpses of Popeye bravely battling his way through rough seas in a tiny rowboat, with a shot of Sweethaven's bellringer silhouetted against ominously stormy skies on the church tower. Suddenly, in a magical transformation, the storm clouds vanish and brilliant blue skies greet the villagers as they pour from their homes to chorus their declaration of faith by way of Sweethaven's own anthem:

'Sweet Sweethaven
God must love us
We the people
Home Sweethaven'

A fleeting suspicion that the Oklahomans have returned with their lyric celebration of 'Oh, What a Beautiful Morning' is quickly dispelled on all levels. That this is no conventional Hollywood musical is intimated by the ungainly, deliberately *dischoreographed* movements with which the villagers accompany their sweet melody; that all is not well in this self-styled paradise of Sweethaven, not only by these curiously inhibited transports, or by the ramshackle if picturesque appearance of the village itself, but by the sullen suspicion escalating into outright hostility which greets the arrival of Popeye as a stranger in their midst.

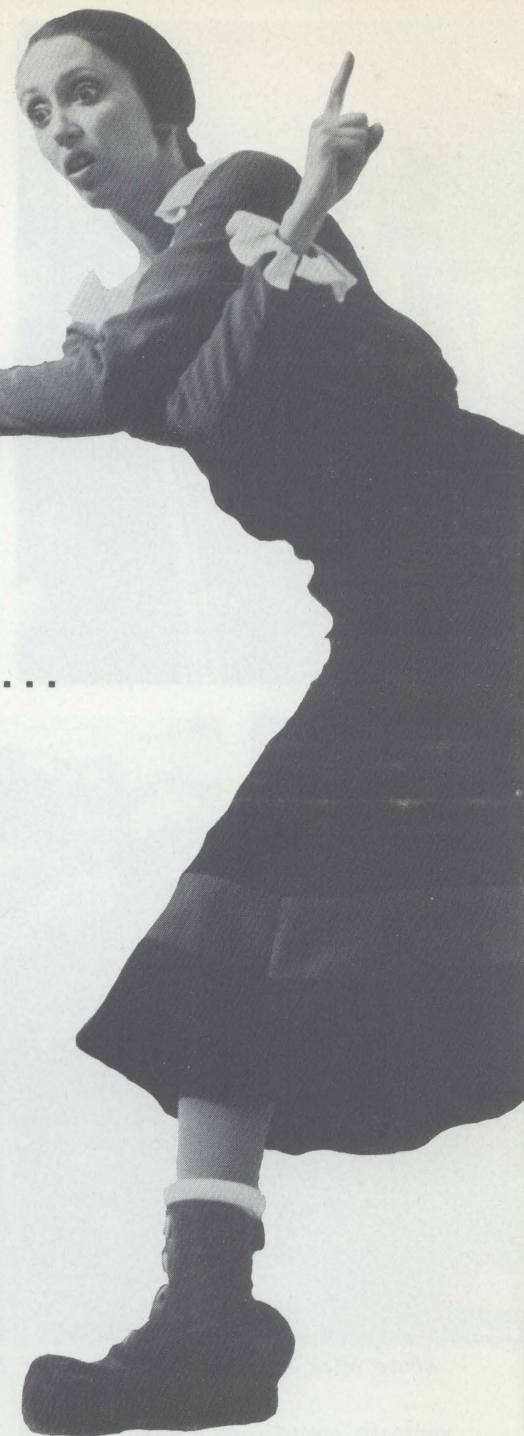
It only takes the irruption of the Tax Collector, levying tribute on anything that happens to come to mind ('New in Town Tax . . . Rowboat Under Wharf Tax . . . Leaving Junk on Wharf Tax') for the sense of disillusionment to be complete. What price Sweethaven in a

community of rust-bound automata arbitrarily ruled by the taxman backed up by strong-arm man Bluto, with behind him the mysterious, all-powerful Commodore? We are back in that best of all possible worlds, the land of free enterprise and opportunity commemorated so blandly by the veteran Country and Western star Haven Hamilton in *Nashville*.

Yet there is a difference between Haven Hamilton's grass-roots populism and the innocent naiveté of Sweethaven's anthem. Launching into his flag-waving history of militaristic America ('We must be doin' something right/To last two hundred years'), or his tearful chronicle of the end of a love affair ('For the sake of the children/We must say goodbye'), Hamilton is smoothly manipulating his audience with a display of empty emotion that precisely pinpoints the movie's view of America's sickness. The inhabitants of Sweethaven probably don't believe what they sing either; but here, in their awkward hesitation, the smoothness has been replaced by cracks in the façade, revealing a vulnerability that *might* be open to truth.

For all that it is a collection of rattle-trap houses, seemingly built out of fragments of driftwood roughly clapped together and likely to fall apart at the slightest jolt, Sweethaven has a curious beauty of its own. Nestling under a cliff by the bluest of Mediterranean seas, harbouring a fleet of boats ranging from Venetian gondolas to Heath Robinson eccentricities, it is the doll's village of a child's dreams, comprising an architectural mix that almost (but not quite) conjures Swiss chalets, Gothic follies, and the precarious hillside shacks of Valparaiso. It might almost be the product of a Martian's wayward imagination, fed by legends as to what life on Earth must have been like; and the people this alien envisions as its inhabitants are only barely human.

Our introduction to them, during the performance of the Sweethaven anthem, is effected by way of a blanketing fog of



sight gags. Counterpointing (indeed, almost negating) the fluid rhythms of the song, each character enacts a tiny, unfinished slapstick comedy of his own. One is marooned aloft a ladder in a state of permanent vacillation. Another vainly pursues an errant hat imbued with the prankish life of a hoptoad, and so on. Continuing to accompany the main action as marginal annotations while Popeye finds lodgings with the Oyl family and begins to make the acquaintance of Sweethaven, they function as visual equivalents to the overlapping dialogue and offscreen throwaways that feature so idiosyncratically in Altman's style; and like that dialogue, notably in *M*A*S*H*, *McCabe and Mrs Miller* and *California Split*, the slapstick annotations constantly threaten to swamp the screen.

Then comes the first moment of self-assertion from the main action—and, simultaneously, a first acknowledgment



Left: Olive (Shelley Duvall), undecided; above, Popeye (Robin Williams), home from the sea.

of the crack revealing the vulnerability underneath—as Olive Oyl is moved by the tittering disparagements of her girlfriends to take to song in defence of her fiancé, the horrible Bluto. She begins bravely with ‘Tall, good-lookin’, and he’s large’; but it quickly becomes evident that Bluto has only two recommendations that spring to mind, the fact that ‘he’s large ... and he’s mine’. And as lyric inspiration fails to keep pace with the romantic yearnings of the music, with the same adjectives desperately pressed into service again and again, there is something indescribably forlorn about the song’s ‘triumphant’ conclusion:

‘I’m thankful for what I’ve got
It may not be a lot
But he’s large
... And he’s mine’

Hereabouts there is a marvellous moment when Popeye and Olive, puppets both like the rest of the villagers, are engaged in an altercation occasioned by jealousy over Sweet’pea, the orphan baby who initially drew them into proximity. Popeye, not yet ready to acknowledge the truth he must ultimately admit (‘I ain’t man enough to be his mother’), nevertheless confronts Olive with an apology, in a face-to-face that draws ever closer as she thrusts out her neck in indignant anticipation, until finally pursing her lips into an explosive ‘Phooey!’ she manages accidentally on purpose to brush his lips in a kiss.

The kidnapping of Sweet’pea, attended by Popeye’s awareness of guilty responsibility, is the trigger that fully releases

emotion for the first time. Again the medium is a song: Olive’s amazed realisation that ‘He Needs Me!’, performed as a solo on a deserted wharf, and introduced by an angled shot down that lends her the archetypally forlorn expectancy of a taxi-dancer hugging her dreams to herself even as she goes through the motions of a waltz. Here, too, the words are hesitant and impoverished, but the repetitions ring out this time with a lyric joy that leaves one (like the hypothetical visitor from Mars) flooded with amazement that such creatures can harbour such transparent feelings: ‘And all at once I knew/I knew at once/I knew he needed me/No one ever asked before/Because they never needed me/But he does ...’

Altman’s debt to Harry Nilsson for these wonderfully imaginative songs, which wed the external inarticulacy of the characters to the harmonious melody buried inside them, is of course incalculable. But credit for the conception in which they are so perfectly used—a shotgun marriage between D. W. Griffith melodrama and silent slapstick comedy which produces a strangely moving mutant offspring—is surely due to Altman alone. A conception suggesting that Essex (Paul Newman), that quintessential Altman hero, may have had the last word after all when, at the end of *Quintet*, he sets off into the icy wastes, determined to find an oasis of tenderness and joy, refusing to believe that the world is dead and that he must inevitably die with it.

The haven Essex dreamed of finding is surely here, alive and well, in Sweet-haven. But in Altman’s less than enchanted view of the scabby, drily self-seeking modern world, such ideals can only exist in fantasy or survive in nostalgic memory. Hence this puppet world, this imagined environment fashioned out of shreds and patches, the debris and crumbling mortar of remembrance of things past like helpless orphans and long-lost fathers, like family ties and abiding love, like home and happiness. In a sort of miracle, we see two human beings emerge from this cartoon environment to start all over again like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Is it possible, the film dreams, that the old virtues of love, honour and respect could be merely dormant, ready to be born again?

To talk about what is to all intents and purposes a Disney entertainment in these terms is in a sense absurd, and certainly it is to leave no room to mention countless incidental treasures, which range from the frowning octopus with which Popeye has to do battle down to the knowing chuckles of Sweet’pea, by way of a kaleidoscope of performances (all superlative) which capture the comic-strip modes and mannerisms with uncanny brilliance. But since *Popeye* has by and large been welcomed here as fun but pointless, it seems worth at least drawing attention to the powerful emotional undercurrents which, not for the first time in an Altman film, have largely escaped critics.

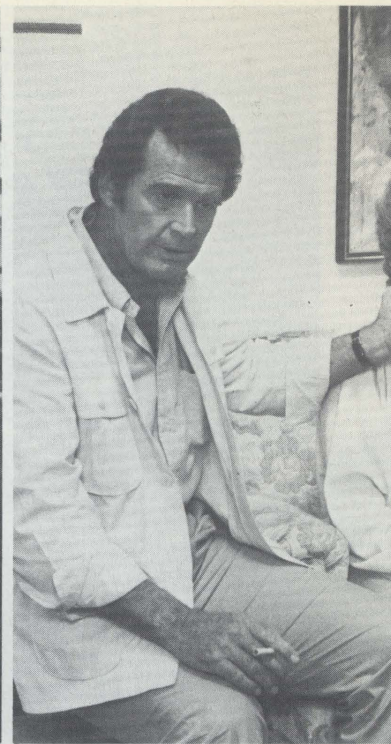
ALTMAN TALKING

I really asked to do *Popeye* because ... why not? A movie is just a fantasy anyway. And it occurred to me that this was a chance to create my own environment, which I'd done in *Quintet* but it didn't work with audiences or critics. Popeye was never really a favourite of mine. I mean, I was certainly aware of him when I was very young. I was a sort of frustrated cartoonist myself, and it was easy to draw Popeye, easy to copy him. But I didn't really understand what I consider to be the social impact Popeye had until I decided I was going to do the picture, then went back and read a lot of the original comic strips.

What I think we're doing in both *Quintet* and *Popeye* is creating a culture that has its own restrictions and boundaries. I dare say that if I took you to some Sherpa village in Tibet, the way people live there and their customs would be as strange to you as the people in Sweethaven. *Quintet* was a lot more allegorical, because we only dealt with the principal characters, and everyone else was almost zombie-like. But of course that was part of the particular environment. What I'm trying to say is that the environment, the look of the place, the costumes, the fact of the dogs in *Quintet* or the absence of animals in Sweethaven ... all those things, whatever the rules I set up, are not anything you can immediately identify with. With *Popeye*, of course, I had the cartoon history to back me up. Had I invented the whole thing myself, and said okay, this is a fairy tale I'm going to show you, the picture would probably be a failure.

It's not possible, but I would love to be able to show *Popeye* to a broad audience of people who had absolutely no reference to the cartoons or the comic strips, cutting out the Max Fleischer extract and starting with the storm at sea. What would they think? I haven't the slightest idea. A few might say, My God, this is genius; ninety-nine out of a hundred would probably say this is the silliest thing I've ever seen in my life and get very angry. So the pre-knowledge people have of Popeye is on the one hand a help, and on the other a hindrance, because everyone has his own image, and if I don't live up to that, I'm either falling short or I've gone too far.

I don't want to get glib about this, but what I was trying to do in creating the *Quintet* environment was to show that life itself can come down to an ethnic game. Most cultures have games that are indigenous, they grow out of people playing polo or whatever; but what we were saying in *Quintet* was that there was nothing else, there was no diversion, and eventually it came down to where the



Left: a righteous Popeye among the punters; centre: Esther, champion of health, revived.

game itself was life. And the only people who really had the sense of life were those who played the game. After all, interchange in life is just ... it's like when children play, they're practising being adults, they're imitating, like animals do when they're taught to hunt or birds when they learn to fly. But we're showing the destruction of what I consider *human*, when everything gets down to the smallest set of rules and emotions disappear; and then I bring the alien in, the man who messes the directions up. I don't think *Quintet* necessarily took place on this planet. I consider it a parallel society rather than necessarily an extension of *this* society. Or it could be either. And I didn't care to tell about that ... which was one of the criticisms levelled against the film.

You may be right that in *Quintet* I doubly exclude the audience, in that not only is the setting very strange, but the rules of the game on which everything depends are not explained. That's true, but you can't teach anybody a game. I've been playing backgammon for thirty years, and my wife knows the rules, but I could never teach her backgammon because she just doesn't want to learn. So, in a film, so long as I know there's a reality, then I don't feel I have to teach it to anybody. If I know it's real, then I can confidently go ahead and show it, and assume my confidence will spill over to the audience, that they'll realise it really is a game. I don't think they have to know how to play it.

Actually, the game in *Quintet* is one I invented, and it's a very good game. The problem is that it takes too many players, and in today's society games have to be two-handed rather than family games. However, I got a letter recently from a girl in Chicago. She and her boyfriend had found a set of the rules for *Quintet* which we printed up for the original press kit, and she sent me pictures of elaborate inlaid leather boards she'd

made and taken to these science fiction clubs that meet around the country. And now they're having tournaments ...

Unlike *Popeye* or *A Wedding*, the characters in *Quintet* are simply pieces on the board. So the film gets back to the idea of hope and what is a human view of things. That is why we harped so much on memory with the Bibi Andersson character. She says 'I don't trust my memories,' and Essex says, 'Memory's all you can trust.' In other words, we're really talking about a dead world, in which there was no hope, absolutely no hope of survival. And in the end, when Essex is challenged as he's leaving, he says 'I'm going north' because that's where he saw the wild goose going. Told he'll be dead in a day and a half, he says 'You may know that, but I don't.' And that, to me, is humanism. And when you see him at the very end, walking off into the snow, I think anybody who is halfway intelligent has got to know that in a day and a half he's going to be dead.

I don't think anybody would ever believe how *Quintet* evolved. It started out as a kind of surrealistic thriller with reference to the Irish underground, not specifically, but that's the only country I know of today that has this anarchy on two almost distinct social levels. It took place in the underbelly of a city, where these dogs roamed but didn't terrify the people living there, and yet you wonder why aren't they afraid of those man-eating dogs? And then this killing, this man trying to uncover the mystery. We were going to shoot it in the underbelly of Chicago, looking kind of like *Odd Man Out* and *The Third Man*. Then we found this location in Montreal, and I decided we would freeze it, advance the period. After that the game developed, though both it and the dogs were always there.

Even before that, the germ of the film actually started in Rome. I had had about an hour of walking round a hotel room, looking out of windows and into



Right: 'Quintet': Essex dicing for the ultimate stakes.

courtyards. I was waiting for someone to pick me up, and I was having a drink standing beside a door to another suite that was locked. Standing near this door, looking across those open courtyards, I was watching two men carrying on a conversation out there. Suddenly I started hearing a man and a woman talking in the next suite, not totally distinctly but enough. So I was watching one thing and hearing something else; and the idea came that if these people I heard were plotting an assassination, and those I was watching were the victims ... where did that put me? I think it's impossible for me to transmit to you the connection, but it did as a matter of fact kind of follow through to *Quintet*—although it never really occurred to me until this moment—when Essex *hears* and *sees* something similar. These elements do come in to stay, and consequently *can* become confusing to an audience. Maybe it's my own arrogance that says you don't have to understand them. We accept everything in our own lives, yet we want order in our fantasies.

Your idea that the game in *Quintet* might represent mainstream Hollywood, with the judges and arbiters as producers and critics, and Essex as myself, the lone independent ... well, if that is a fact, it is so subconscious that I would never allow it to surface. But that's what a film should be. If it works for you, if you can see those analogies, then terrific. I mean, it's like looking at a painting. Or ... take a tiger, wandering through the jungle in India at the end of the day, and suddenly there's this absolutely magnificent sunset. Does the tiger stop and look at that and say, God, how beautiful, or does he not? I think probably not. Which makes the difference between our brain and the tiger's. On the other hand, I don't know that he doesn't *feel* something. I know that temperature controls what animals feel and whether they're hungry or not. So how do we know that they don't eat

certain leaves at certain times, which is the equivalent of you getting drunk or changing your perceptions? I think that if I had thought specifically of *Quintet* as a metaphor for film-making, I would have been afraid of it.

The danger of these kinds of conversations and interviews to me is that if I start explaining or thinking about ... I don't really want to know *why*. The minute I articulate it, I say, oh yeah ... and then I begin to believe what I say. I narrow everybody's view of what that film can be. Because if I say it means *this* to me, you are arbitrarily and almost necessarily bound to look within the range that I have set for it. Take, for instance, my own image of the way that *3 Women* ended. One sees seals, or sea-lions, basking on rocks, just kind of lying around. And I see *3 Women* as if those three female seals had kicked the last male off that rock and are much more comfortable ... but at the same time you know it means the end of the species.

Health began when a fellow who'd edited a health food magazine for some years came to me with the idea of doing a film about health foods. I liked the idea, but as we worked on it for a long time, on and off, I felt that just to deal with the health food thing directly was not going to do much. There's nothing wrong with people being concerned about nutrition and health. And I didn't want merely to parody the commercial aspects that are so terrible. So we brought in the political situations and it sort of grew.

The character played by Glenda Jackson isn't exactly Adlai Stevenson, but most of her speeches were paraphrases, and some of them were exact Stevenson speeches. That speech from the tower, for instance, was one of his; and she sounded very much like him, he had a very high voice ... not that anybody is going to remember these things. He was the first political figure that really impressed me. But when we were cutting,

we got very nervous about that tower scene. Originally there was much more continuity to what she said. But we felt that the film suddenly stopped to say okay, here's the liberal message. So we started slicing into it until you only heard sections of the speech and there was no sense of continuity to what was being said. So that could very well explain why, as you commented, the Stevenson who so impressed me sounds at times just as much like Ronald Reagan.

You see, when I make films ... it's like colour running in a garment. You might have a nice blue figure on a shirt, and you put it in hot water, and suddenly it just runs through the whole shirt. That kind of thing happens. But beyond the political element, the idea of shooting *Health* in Florida was very important. I don't think I would have made that film in Chicago or any place else. Everybody around there was in their eighties, or they certainly looked it. And all those people in St Petersburg, those old people down there—again, what the film was *about*—they behaved so well, they're really good Americans, they do what they're told. They're told to work hard, to save their money, to go to church, and then they can retire when they're sixty-five.

Retirement means that they can go to Florida, they don't have to worry about the cold weather any more, they walk up and down the beach. But there's no sand on those beaches, it looks like sand but actually it's just rather hard, ground-up crust. And I see these people walking up and down the beach, just going right into it. I can almost see them disappear until they're a part of it. I think it's a terrible way to die. Because when people die in old age, in retirement, actually their life has ended a long time ago, it's like an elephants' graveyard, just walking up and down until they disappear. ... Randy Newman did a great love story song ... 'Who'll buy a house? And then we'll go to Florida till we die ...'

When I started the Lion's Gate company five years ago, it seemed an ideal set-up. I never sat back and said, Now I want to have a company. But as I acquired hardware and software and people, it was a matter of self-defence against the Establishment, which is no good. But I felt even then the danger that we'd grow and grow until we became the thing that we set out to oppose. I mean, it's true of every liberal politician who ever lived, by the time he's seventy, he's conservative. You become what it is you set out to fight against. I think that if I had an observation in mind while filming *Health*, being among all those old people down there—and I think it carried over into *Popeye*—it was that in order to attain power, every nation, group, large culture or what-have-you has to have a slave class. And the slave class of America is the middle class.

I don't suppose it was planned, but it was very clever. People escaped from Europe because they were tired of being poor, and they go to this new land of opportunity, and then they realise ... We have really created a slave class. That is, the absolute power of the United States is the middle class. They do every-

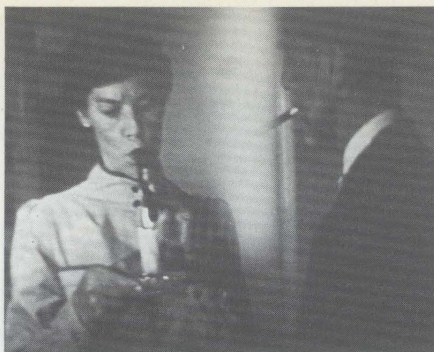
thing exactly right. They put their money in savings banks at low interest rates. The churches have been exempted from paying taxes, so they gather more money. The churches and the insurance companies are the richest forces. They're the ones that then are able to exercise the power, and people behave. They buy a new car every two years, because they're told that's what they're supposed to do, and that keeps the basic economy going. I think it's going to be very interesting to see what happens now that the automobile is really over, a finished thing.

The people in *Popeye* are like that, being exploited by a dictator whom they've never seen. But I don't think it makes a hell of a lot of difference what I say in these films. I didn't promise you a rose garden. I have no alternative, I can only show you what I think the ills are, and the fact that they overcome me too. And maybe that's the most positive thing that can be done: to focus attention so that if enough people see they will solve their problem. I have this great optimism that always translates into pessimism. But I'm not sure that that's wrong. In *Quintet*, we take this man who absolutely has the spirit of the human being in him, saying, By God, I'm not going to lie down and die just because everybody tells me I have to. I'm going on. You say, That's noble, boy. Then the music starts and this triumphant thing, and the guy goes off and dies.

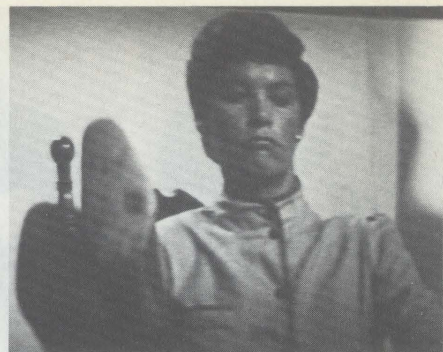
Talking about my work this way ... I think most people would say my films are very different from each other. There was a time when I believed that was true, but I don't believe it's true now. Just intelligently, I have to realise that it can't be true, it must be the same, coming from one source. If you talk long enough, press hard enough, then all the films of any film-maker, good, bad or indifferent, finally become to some extent at least variations on a theme. The complexity of our brain cells is such that no two brains are alike. There is a great similarity in our feelings and basic responses to things, but no two are exactly alike. And everything that's happened, everything you see, that you're exposed to, every feeling, every disappointment, every success, all those various emotions cram up in this computer, and that information is there. I think if I were to do ... I guess it's science fiction ... I would say that if you could go every five years or so and have your brain wiped absolutely clean of all the information that's in it, you could probably live for ever. I think that what we die of is too much information, when we finally get so much information and counter information that it all comes out and you say, 'Oh well, what the hell ...'

On *Quintet*, I actually drew the plans for that network of cities, how they worked and how the trains communicated from one to the other, and how each sector contained a million people, and how there were five sectors and each one was five levels deep, and then there were five of those that made a cluster. And suddenly they became almost molecular structures. In that sense, all these films of mine are science fiction ...

R.C./T.M.



'Health': Isabella faces the Colonel.



The hole in Adlai's shoe?

HEALTH

Health is the last film that Robert Altman made under his contract with 20th Century-Fox, ending a run of films between 1977 and 1980 that certainly made him one of the most employed directors of the period. But it marked that end in almost total silence, since Fox were so unhappy with the film (reportedly because of disastrous sneak previews) that they allowed it to be shown no more than was necessary to fulfil their contractual obligations, and have since shelved it indefinitely. After such an ending, not even a whimper in commercial terms, one would not have been surprised if Altman had entered on a comparable period of unemployment, at least as far as the major studios were concerned. But, fortuitously, he then found himself at the helm of *Popeye*, co-financed by Paramount and Walt Disney, and certain to be one of his biggest box-office successes.

This sequence of events is not so much ironic as just plain confusing. In the Altman canon, *Health* is another of those intricately populated frescoes (*Nashville*, *A Wedding*), in which the sociable gifts of an amiable host and the suspicious instincts of a social satirist meet and neutralise each other in the bland Panavision spaces. They have, however, usually been his best card with both critics and public. The blockbusting *Popeye*, paradoxically, would have to stand on the other side of Altman, in the shadow with those more closely argued, leanly plotted and commercially dubious essays (*McCabe and Mrs Miller*, *Quintet*) on the politics of community. This might seem a perverse alignment, given the comic-strip-fairy-tale-musical-comedy ingredients that make *Popeye* the perfect children's fantasy that grown-ups can enjoy too. But what is significant here is not *Popeye* himself, nor Olive Oyl nor Sweetpea, nor even the Thimble Theater characters whom Altman choreographs into his most delightfully scene-filling background yet. It is the town of Sweethaven itself, looking like the expressionist ghetto of *The Golem*, all crazy angles and impossible perspectives, yet not just clinging figuratively to

the edge of this world but actually built on the side of a Maltese cliff, palpably inhabitable.

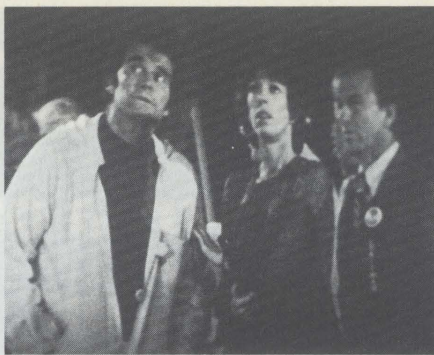
In its rawness and ramshackleness and yet solidity, it harks back to Presbyterian Church in *McCabe and Mrs Miller*. Sweethaven, of course, is a limbo society rather than a pioneer one—and at another extreme, the anonymous city in *Quintet* is a terminal one. But the Western connection is important to all three—in a way, is the real backbone of Altman's most substantial films. To begin with, it is curious that he should have painstakingly built 'real' settings for three such fantasies, while *Health*, a contemporary subject for which nothing had to be built, seems to be taking place nowhere in particular. The setting is St Petersburg, Florida, but this is just stated, never shown. The action is entirely confined to the hotel where a convention is taking place to elect a president for the national health food association. But compared to Altman's specificity about the city in *Quintet*, the hotel remains a strangely undynamic space, its geography unclear, even its décor (including the clutter of health food products and brand names) as blankly utilised as in those compendium films about various characters in various hotel suites.

Altman's one decorative flourish might be taken as a wry comment on this sense of enclosure and insulation. Occasionally punctuating events, a long shot of the hotel—the only time we are allowed outside it—reveals it to be, whether neon or sun-lit, a massively pink and fairy-tale structure. But the effect of the shot is somehow more forlorn than satirical. Partly this is because Altman's intention is not to satirise the health food faddists themselves but, through them, the whole American political process. That image therefore becomes the repository of both cultish eccentricity and national aspirations; it is Altman's America, a strangely antediluvian-looking dream castle. 'We had such high hopes in the beginning,' says the unashamedly opportunist hero at the end, about his failed attempt to re-woo his ex-wife, but with a clear and similar double meaning.

In the wistfulness of that remark and the quaintness of the pink elephant that houses the convention there also seems to be a suspicion that the inevitable fate of any society is a kind of entropy. The 'communal' ethos of so much of Altman's film-making, and his hesitation about attaching any definite meaning to the



Isabella speaks from on high...



To an unconvinced audience.



Brother Lester loses his cool.

result, suggest his fear that once the community has been achieved, defined, it is done for. He has commented that he favours neither the old-world patriarchy nor the hippie communality of *A Perfect Couple*: both are passé, they have outlived their usefulness. Finally, and in line with this, that distant prospect of the hotel is the only time that *Health* holds still for long enough to throw up a conceptual image—the rest is a buzz of oddity that is still in the process of happening. The whole of *Popeye*, however, crystallised in the prospect of Sweethaven, is such an image.

To adapt an aphorism to Altman, the past—for which Sweethaven is a kind of surrogate—is not so much a foreign country as the one he would most like to believe in. The present is a constricting threat, to which the best response is to keep one's options as open as possible, settings and meanings as amorphous as possible. *Health* pursues this policy even more aggressively than *Nashville* or *A Wedding*. The two contestants for the presidency of 'Health' are Esther Brill (Lauren Bacall), the populist, platitude-spouting old trouser, and Isabella Garnell (Glenda Jackson), the severe intellectual who subsists on a diet of hot water and high-minded phraseology. Gloria Burbank (Carol Burnett) attends as a special adviser on health to the White House, while her ex-husband, Harry Wolff (James Garner), is, by coincidence, one of Esther's campaign managers. 'Dirty tricks' are the province of Bobby Hammer (Henry Gibson), who eventually cooks up a scandal about Isabella having had a sex-change operation, and behind him is the irascible 'fixer' Colonel Cody (Donald Moffat), representing the conspiracy theory of politics.

In addition, there is a galaxy of human scene-setting: chorines dressed as tomatoes and security men armed with walkie-talkies and armoured in corn-on-the-cob costumes. Real-life commentators drop in to commentate: Dick Cavett is host to a talk show being clumsily marshalled behind the opening credits, and while later touring the stands, he is 'surprised' to find Walter Cronkite among a gaggle of bystanders. At the end, Cavett hands over to Dinah Shore, who arrives to cover a hypnotists' convention—just as the health conclave had been preceded by the manure lobby. The reality here is the broadcasters' reality: conventions, like politics, are a way of life, what matters is the continuity, not what any particular

event is putting on display.

The boldest, and most problematic, of these real-life incursions is the parallel explicitly made—then explicitly left undeveloped—between this contest and the Eisenhower-Adlai Stevenson play-off. Esther Brill ('The Pure President') is Eisenhower; Isabella Garnell ('Voice of Vision') is Stevenson. But beyond this, not much can be said. Altman draws back from using the metaphor metaphorically; it is simply another jab of reality, like Cavett's presence, intended to stimulate the flow of fictional juices but not in any way to contaminate them with a message or a meaning. Altman even deliberately confuses the identification: putting actual Stevenson speeches into Isabella's mouth, but in such a way that only a style (intellectual disdain), not any content, comes across. Isabella can then become an increasingly ominous figure, shot and lit in such a way as to suggest a potential dictator, with the accoutrements—a tape-recorder always to hand, in case she feels the urge to speechify—of a Nixon.

This may be Altman's view of the inevitable consequence of political arrogance posing as a liberal conscience, but it is not a view that is argued anywhere in the film. The confusion over Isabella is passed off as another symptom of the confusion of the political process—the candidates are all the same in the end, the only thing that matters is that the show keeps on rolling. This solipsism is not uncommon in Altman's contemporary subjects: the busily unravelling *mise-en-scène* is proof that things are beyond our (and the director's) control. What makes *Health* a more extreme instance than, say, *A Wedding* or *Nashville* is that not only does it present more information and narrative threads than it is prepared, thematically, to make sense of, but its jottings of political comment, TV personality mongering and Altmanesque carnival are fundamentally unreconcilable. What, for instance, is the significance in the political context of the sit-com/screwball comedy of Garner and Burnett? His cynicism and her naiveté suggest there is a significance, but they remain resolutely unintegrated. The secret of *Health*'s suppression may be that so largely undigested a film is none too easy for audiences to assimilate.

In a way, the most important figure in *Health* is neither Isabella/Stevenson nor Esther/Eisenhower, but its most mythical and mysterious character, wild-eyed Colonel Cody. He has not been

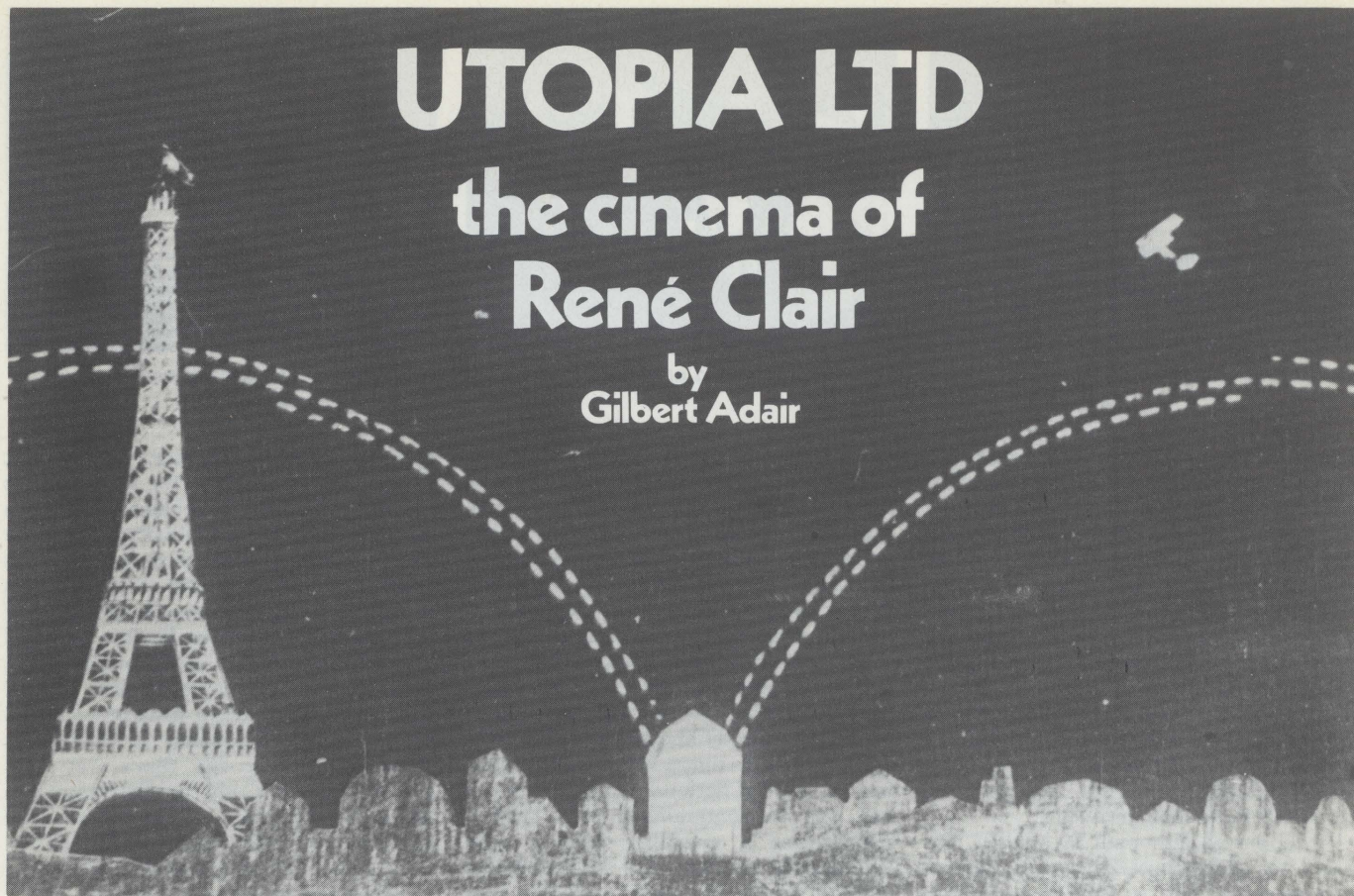
lightly named—or rather, he has not lightly named himself, for in the film's rather reductionist scheme, even his metaphorical threat is finally defused by the revelation that he is simply Esther's crazy brother Lester. But what he brings to mind, of course, is the charlatanism of the 'authentic' Cody in *Buffalo Bill and the Indians*, and the charlatanism which for Altman always overtakes reality (history/politics) when it becomes identified with a performance (a Wild West show/movies). In the film's two best scenes, 'Colonel Cody' briefly crystallises *Health*'s straying thoughts on the unreality of the reality of politics. Confronting Isabella, and abusing her for thinking she could take over the organisation he claims to control, he finally determines that her beliefs are genuine, i.e. that she is 'real', and therefore no threat to anyone. Then, confronting Gloria and abusing her for impulsively coming out in support of Isabella, he declares that neither she nor the White House are beyond his possibly lethal reach.

In Altman's own expression, the real danger of the Colonel is that he is so crazy that people believe him. But his link with the past, however spurious, represents the most lucid symbol in the film for the country's betrayed ideals. In a contemporary context, Altman's identification of what he is doing with what he is describing is all the more instant and sentimental. His sham is the one we live in, the thin fuzz of 'reality' he puts on the screen and then leaves to its own devices encapsulates our helplessness and his authorial abdication. Ironically enough—given the assumption that Altman has supplanted genre filmmaking with a cinema of spontaneous combustion—it is only when he returns to the past, to something like a Western setting, that this identification becomes artistically interesting. Putting together a movie, recreating a society, in the rugged conditions of *McCabe and Mrs Miller*, *Quintet* and *Popeye* is in itself a pioneer experience. These films consequently expand beyond the easy cynicism of *Nashville*, *A Wedding* or *Health*. At the time the town of Presbyterian Church went up, after all, Altman was known as the independent director prepared to spend most of his budget on getting the setting just right before cast and crew moved in, rather than the host of independent jamborees in which meaning has to be free-associated by cast and audience.

UTOPIA LTD

the cinema of René Clair

by
Gilbert Adair



I once met René Clair. Five or six years ago, with the vague notion of soliciting an interview, I persuaded an acquaintance of mine, an Argentinian critic, to let me accompany him on a visit to the director's *hôtel particulier* in Neuilly. Clair, gaunt and elegant, a Giacometti stick sculpture in a silk dressing-gown, eyes not open but ajar, proved predictably witty and urbane in a dry, tindery sort of way. Not so predictable, certainly, was his habit, when proffering cigarettes, of extracting them one by one from the monkish pockets of his robe, their silvery tips feeling slightly dented in the mouth from the exquisite pressure of his cigarette-thin fingers (an affectation which, I could never quite make up my mind, constituted either the height of preciosity or of vulgarity). But what struck me most forcibly and disinclined me to request the interview—foolishly, as I see now—was the unshakable conviction that this dandified fossil *could not possibly be a film director*, could not belong to that race of artists whose common denominator, however various their inspiration, was an artisanal robustness, physical, mental or both.

He has since died, of course, and a committee of Paris city councillors must even now be pondering the question of just which minor thoroughfare might conveniently be redesignated the Avenue René Clair. His name will become an address, a household word to future generations of ordinary people wholly ignorant of his work and perhaps of the precise standing of a 'director'. And though, in the arts, one should always beware of writing the obituary of Lazarus, it's difficult from the vantage point of the 1980s to conceive of Clair ever reclaiming his former niche in the Pan-

theon of film history (or, rather, of the history of film criticism).

He who was once compared to Mozart by James Agee (at a period when Mozart's name was less cavalierly banded about by film critics), who was universally esteemed as one of the medium's rare geniuses, is now, without ever having suffered the on occasion meritorious indignity of being attacked (or the merciful one of being totally forgotten), judged superfluous to it. Especially as relatively few of his contemporaries have deigned to acknowledge his influence, traceable nevertheless in the films of Chaplin, Cocteau, Lubitsch and Mamoulian, Preston Sturges, Minnelli, Donen and Walters, in the Renoir of *French Cancan* and *Eléna et les hommes*, the Truffaut of the Antoine Doinel cycle (except *Les Quatre Cents coups*) and the Demy of *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg*, not forgetting Wilder, whose *Irma la Douce* was a homage to Clair no less affectionate than *Love in the Afternoon* to Lubitsch and whose early, seldom seen comedy *Mauvaise Graine* might almost pass for an example of the French director's work.

Any champion of Clair as a major artist (a status confirmed for me by a recent re-viewing of several of his films) must begin by disposing of the myth, once so complacently taken for granted, of his 'universality'. At least in a poor translation, one would be forgiven for failing to distinguish between a paragraph written by Tolstoy and another by Balzac: frescoes tend to fuzziness in detail. But no one could similarly confuse Firbank, let's say, with Poe. By sacrificing narrative scope and emotional depth to an ever more delirious refinement of pure *écriture*, the latter succeeded in mapping

out discrete, hermetically sealed and instantly recognisable 'worlds', whose rhetorical incrustations rested on slight, sometimes shaky foundations. So it was with Clair, even if the miniaturist intricacy of his films was often belied by the blandly transparent limpidity of their visual textures (not for nothing did René Chomette, as he was christened, adopt a *nom de caméra-stylo* meaning 'clear').

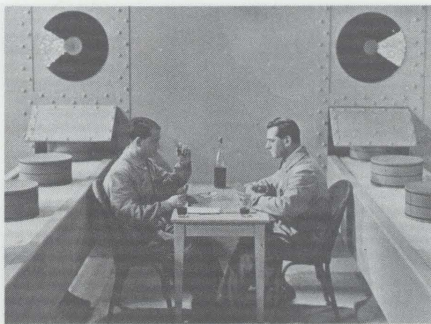
The principal ingredient of this work is its nostalgia. Clair was apparently *born* nostalgic (like the elderly gentleman in *Les Belles de nuit* who, even in the Stone Age, pines for the good old days). Out of twenty-five features, just over half were set either wholly or partly in the past; others in a charmingly anachronistic Paris of which the Eiffel Tower was the natural logo; still others (*A nous la liberté*, *Tout l'or du monde*) disingenuously juxtaposed contemporary urban values and traditional rural ones, the former caricatured, the latter idealised. Even the satirical treatment of automation in *A nous la liberté* had its roots in nostalgia: given its naively Vernian imagery of mechanisation, it's almost as if, unaware that mass production techniques were already in force in 1931, Clair imagined he was venturing into the realm of science-fiction. Like the web of bubbling test-tubes in Frankenstein's laboratory, the machines designed for the film were clearly not intended to *work*, their sole function being iconographical, just as all that the conveyor belt seeks to convey is the alienating routine of heavy industry. And, whether conscious or not, it's characteristic of Clair that the article which finally emerges as the factory's end product is a phonograph, the kind whose calyx-shaped horn with its Loïe Fuller

arabesques has turned it into the very emblem of Belle Epoque bewitchment.

Even less astringent is the 'satire' of the bourgeoisie in *Un chapeau de paille d'Italie* (1927), based on Labiche and Marc Michel's classic farce about a wedding delayed by the bridegroom's frantic endeavours to replace a lady's straw hat eaten by his horse on the way to church. In the unlikely event of any child wishing to collect toy bourgeois, like toy soldiers, this film offers a complete set: philandering wife and jealous cuckold of a husband, shrewish maiden aunt and stone deaf uncle, et al. But so tightly have they been screwed into their respective comic archetypes (making the commedia dell'arte seem positively neo-realist by comparison), so mechanical are their collective misadventures, that one is disappointed not to find huge wind-up keys protruding from their backs. The targets of Clair's mockery are invariably behavioural rather than founded on class structures: 'bourgeois' here means only pompous, garrulous, fussy, prudish or senile. In effect, it's a satirist's metaphor for 'human'. And since no member of the dramatis personae displays much more social or psychological consistency than the nightmarish freaks of Chaplin's shorts, it's perhaps not surprising that, when it was released, an irate exhibitor complained to the distributors of having been sent an 'old film'.

When in 1947, with *Le Silence est d'or*, Clair co-opted cinema itself as his subject matter, it was to propose a wistful toast to the silent period; and in his and Armand Salacrou's rather turgid adaptation of the Faust legend, *La Beauté du diable* (1949, with Gérard Philipe and Michel Simon alternating as Mephistopheles and Faust), the calculated staginess both of Simon's make-up and Léon Barsacq's décors confirmed, across a chasm of almost fifty years, the abiding influence of Méliès. But even the ostensible exception to the rule of Clair's fuddy-duddy archaism, *Entracte*, is deceptive. A 22-minute non-narrative squib, it was screened 'to drive the public out of the auditorium' between the two halves of *Relâche*, a 'ballet instantanéiste' concocted in 1924 by Picabia and Satie (on writing paper filched from chez Maxim's) for Rolfe de Maré's Ballets Suédois—the title, French for 'theatre closed', rebounded on the wag-gish pair when the première was cancelled at the last minute owing to the illness of their leading dancer, Jean Borlin.

For Clair, only a hop, skip and jump separated *cinéma de papa* from *cinéma de dada*, and the comparisons with the Buñuel-Dali shockers that have since dogged this film are simply not relevant (the booing with which it was originally greeted can be attributed to Satie's deliberately monotonous 'furniture music' and must, in any case, have sounded sweeter than applause to a dadaist's ears). Picabia was a determinedly frivolous iconoclast—the ballet ended with him and Satie scooting around the stage in a diminutive motor car—whose scenario



Heading (left): 'Paris qui dort'; above (top down): René Clair; 'A nous la liberté'; 'Les Deux Timides'.

for *Entracte*, calling for a Luna Park roller coaster and a runaway hearse led by a camel, enabled Clair to pay a belated tribute to the slapstick tradition of the Keystone Kops. Apart from the fun of spotting such 20s luminaries as Georges Auric, Man Ray and the bowler-hatted composer himself, perched on a Paris rooftop playing chess with Marcel Duchamp, it can still be enjoyed purely as burlesque, its visual non sequiturs anticipating those of Lester's *The Running, Jumping and Standing Still Film*, and deserved to receive neither scandalised boos nor the hooting I once heard at the Cinémathèque Française (presumably because it wasn't scandalous enough). But it had as much to do with the real avant-garde as Alphonse Allais' celebrated sketch of albino girls trotting through the snow in their white First Communion finery (a blank sheet of paper) had to do with minimalist art.

With *Entracte* Clair contrived to pull a young rabbit out of an old hat, so to

speak, and it was the closest he ever came to 'innovating', another myth surrounding his work that should be laid to rest. What fostered it was the phenomenal ease with which he adapted to the advent of sound, although it's paradoxically in their want of rough edges that the reputation of his earliest talkies as innovatory films has come to seem so suspect. Clair 'played' with sound like a child presented with a new toy trumpet. In *Le Million* (1930), for instance, he transformed the climactic scramble (for an elusive lottery ticket) into a miniature rugby match, complete with referee's whistle and stadium cheers on the soundtrack, a joke which has grown whiskers in service over the years but whose ever-green charm in Clair's version derives from the very gradual process by which the *mélée* is choreographically stylised into a rugger formation. A shade more subtle is the opening sequence of *Sous les toits de Paris* (also 1930), where Albert Préjean, as a pavement hawker of sheet music, attempts to signal the presence of a pickpocket in the crowd gathered around him by adding oddly sinister inflections to his rendering of the theme song, first accelerating it, then slowing it down. And Auric, in the wake of Satie's *Parade*, ingeniously incorporated factory sirens, chugging pistons and the melancholy rhythm of convicts exercising in a prison yard into the acid 'wrong note' harmonies of his score for *A nous la liberté*.

Throughout his career, however, Clair was to make playful, if rarely more than playful, use of many other of the medium's expressive possibilities, to begin with silence itself. As witness his typically whimsical definition of cinema as 'un moyen de nous faire apprécier le silence', there seemed, pre-1929, almost an element of *choice* in his approach to silent film (like Scorsese choosing to shoot in black and white). Since they remain literally unspoken, the sweet nothings exchanged by the lovers in the semi-synchronised *Sous les toits de Paris* are charged with a mysterious intimacy that would have challenged even Clair's deft handling of dialogue; while one is tempted to ascribe the total 'silence' of *Les Deux Timides* (1928, from another play by Labiche and Michel) primarily to the mutual timorousness of its hero and heroine. What with Dickensian servants, coachmen, road sweepers, organ grinders and gawking bystanders, *Un chapeau de paille* can boast at least as many 'speaking' parts as Altman's *A Wedding*, to which it bears a superficial resemblance. And one of its drollest 'silent effects'—deaf old Uncle Vézinet (Paul Oliver) poring over a family album in the foreground and placidly oblivious to the violent family squabble raging just behind his head—was to be reprised thirty years later, enriched by deep focus and voice-off, in *Porte des Lilas* (whose title, 'Gate of Lilacs', alluding as it does to an earthy working-class district of Paris, is rather less Mizoguchian than might immediately be supposed). As the assembled

clients of a local bistro thrill to a newspaper account of a recent bank robbery, unseen by them outside the window each stage of the crime is being re-enacted by a pack of street urchins, with a mongrel-drawn toboggan deputising as the get-away car.

Although Clair's first film, *Paris qui dort* (1923), about a magic ray which has paralysed the city and all its inhabitants (save those visiting the Eiffel Tower), was already exploiting slow motion, speeded-up action and freeze frames for their oniric properties, and though his complete *oeuvre* is peopled by an astonishing number of ghosts, witches, fairies, heavenly emissaries and waxworks come to life, it was really the cinema in its entirety that he viewed, with a miraculously preserved sense of wonderment, as 'special effects'.

This is the *passe-partout* to his work, the 'Eat Me' permitting access to his exquisitely scaled-down universe. Clair's nostalgia was twofold. As well as by the past, and specifically by a mythic 1900 imagery of satiny Valentine cards, Mucha posters, music-hall drop curtains, postcards of Trouville bathing beauties and, of course, the Eiffel Tower, as inescapable in Clair's cinema as on the Paris skyline, it was nurtured by the parallel 'past', both private and collective, of childhood. Not that children themselves figure very prominently in his films (although the tantalising *Air pur*, left uncompleted at the outbreak of war in 1939, was cast almost exclusively from their ranks, of ages ranging from six to thirteen). But, with rare exceptions, his imaginative world was one that a child's mentality could encompass without strain; and by an extremely sparing use of close-ups—watching *Le Million*, for instance, is sometimes like peering through the wrong end of a telescope—he succeeded in holding his characters at a reassuring arm's length.

If s-e-x was never completely absent—despite her initial reluctance to climb into bed with Albert Préjean, there is no nonsense about Pola (Pola Illery), the heroine of *Sous les toits de Paris*, being anything other than an easy lay—its erotic potential was allowed to lie fallow, as it were, within moral and physical confines from which all trace of pain, of either type, had been rigorously expunged. Even in the postwar period, the middle-aged suitors of *Porte des Lilas* and *Tout l'Or du monde* (1961), played by Pierre Brasseur and Bourvil respectively, are still to be found as bashful in feminine company as two lovesick swains. Clair had a fondness for somewhat bland *jeunes premiers*, neither conventionally good-looking nor unprepossessingly plain—Préjean in six early films, Jean Borlin in *Le Voyage imaginaire* (1925), René Lefèvre in *Le Million*, Georges Rigaud in *Quatorze Juillet*, Dick Powell in *It Happened Tomorrow* (1943)—and his favourite actresses were pert soubrettes. His was a cinema of archetypes: a pompous uncle would become the essence of avuncular pomposity, a spiv (often Gaston Modot, uncanny



'Paris qui dort'; 'Le Voyage imaginaire'.

in his likeness to John Cleese) the spiv incarnate.

A similar aversion to ambiguity seems to have dictated his conception of sets and photography. Just as the small provincial bank in which Borlin and his fellow-clerks doze off at the start of *Le Voyage imaginaire* is, with its high stools and musty stacks of paperwork, so precise a filmic transcription of all such sets in nineteenth century Boulevard theatre that to have supplemented it with the merest *soupçon* of a creative imagination at work would have fatally compromised its paradigmatic perfection, so the tinselly wonderland to which their dreams transplant them proves to be both fantastic and wholly predictable, like some fairy-tale told to a spellbound child for the umpteenth time. The phonograph factory of *A nous la liberté* possesses the instant legibility, the immaculate linearity of an architect's blueprint; the papier-mâché public square of *Le Dernier Milliardaire* (1934), set in a mythical European principality that could be called 'Ustinovia', makes no attempt to disguise its origins in operetta.

From *La Proie du vent* in 1926 to *Quatorze Juillet*, Clair's principal set designer was the near-legendary Lazare

Meerson, whose contribution to the steely fragility of these meticulously wrought artefacts it would be hard to overvalue. For Clair's films Meerson sculpted a space that was flat, airy, smooth, predominantly 'white', sparsely furnished and therefore ideally suited both to contain and promote the balletic flux of movement by which the best of them are animated (in direct contrast to the sadistic network of exits and entrances, like so many vertical trap-doors, conducive to the mechanical frenzy of a Feydeau farce). But, though highly artificial, this space was never 'dead'. If the tenement of *Le Million* could be considered a trifle too ethereal for its (presumably) lower middle-class status (an impression reinforced by the fact that certain strategically positioned objects, such as a policeman's bicycle propped against a wall, were in fact painted on the set), Meerson managed to anchor it nevertheless in an identifiable social context by the inclusion of details that would not have occurred to a Hollywood art director: an outside lavatory, a wash-basin on the landing.

Nor was this space ever articulated 'cinematically', in terms of dynamic framing, theatrical perspectives or contrasted blocks of light and shadow. On the contrary, the photographic 'look' of his work remained extraordinarily standardised, not only from film to film but from scene to scene: the lighting which he obtained from his directors of photography (the most accomplished of these being Georges Périnal) was uniformly soft, homogeneous, 'invisible', with not so much as an occasional breath of air to disturb its evenly diffused lustre. Just as any clock glimpsed in a Clair interior seemed permanently set at the hour, so his (rare) exteriors were unaffected by climatic or seasonal variations. The pristine Watteauesque vistas of his last film, *Les Fêtes galantes* (1965), an anaemic rococo romp starring Jean-Pierre Cassel, all looked as if they had been shot at dawn (a fate to which Clair himself had doubtless been consigned—mentally—by his more vociferous detractors from *Cahiers du Cinéma*). Objects were located either 'near' or 'far', with little intermediate shading. This systematic negation of the middle distance is most immediately apparent in *Paris qui dort*, where a diagrammatic, map-like city stretching off to the horizon is fragmented by the metallic cross-hatching of the Eiffel Tower atop which much of the action takes place (an effect repeated less graphically in *Le Voyage imaginaire*, whose dreaming players scramble over the buttresses of Notre-Dame in pursuit of a magic ring).

Clair, however, had an unerring instinct for gyrational movement within the frame, attaining perfection in the half-dozen works that preceded his voluntary exile from France in 1935. A device that he particularly affected was what may be termed the gestural chain reaction. With its multiple narrative strands and intricate interweaving of characters, *Le Million* is virtually one

long conga from beginning to end. And in a non-fantasy scene from *Le Voyage imaginaire*, a humble nosegay destined by Borlin for the bank manager's secretary is delivered in error to the manager himself, who in his turn offers it to his secretary, who scornfully tosses it on the floor, where it is retrieved by a bemused colleague (played by Préjean), from whom Borlin indignantly snatches it back to present it to the secretary all over again. With the arrival of sound (which meant the enchantingly tinny scores of Auric, Maurice Jaubert and especially Georges van Parys, whose parody of French operetta was one of the joys of *Le Million*) Clair's cinema turned into a sprightly round of musical chairs.

The music stopped abruptly in 1935, however, and it was the master of ceremonies himself who was left standing. The linguistic insecurity of exile, the loss of collaborators who had become almost extensions of his own personality and, perhaps, the fact that in the later 30s and war years the Eiffel Tower, with the euphistic frivolity that it symbolised, came to seem an ivory one (in no Clair scenario can one detect even the most peripheral allusion to a political event or social upheaval) all were to play havoc with the delicately sprung mechanism by which his work was held together. Though his subsequent films abounded in incidental felicities, the mould had been definitively shattered.

His two British productions were fitfully amusing (praise admittedly so faint as to merge into outright damning). But on the depressing evidence of *The Ghost Goes West* (1935), an indigestible whimsy about a kilted wraith (Robert Donat) whisked across the Atlantic when his castle is purchased by an American tycoon, Clair's light touch deserted him overnight. And if there were a few undeniably funny moments in *Break the News* (1937), for which Jack Buchanan and Maurice Chevalier impersonated a pair of ham actors feigning a *crime passionnel* as a publicity stunt, it wasn't a patch on its model, *La Mort en fuite*, directed only the previous year by an uninspired journeyman named André Berthomieu but starring the unbeatable tandem of Michel Simon and Jules Berry.

In Hollywood, where such other émigrés as Lang and Renoir (with *Woman on the Beach*) were appropriating the indigenous angst of *film noir*, Clair (just as if he had never left France and were obliged to circumvent Nazi censorship) chose to remain 'posthumously' faithful to his prewar manner with a series of *films roses* enlivened by some vigorous Yankee acting. It's thanks to Dietrich, Fredric March and Veronica Lake, Dick Powell and Linda Darnell that *The Flame of New Orleans* (1940), *I Married a Witch* (1942) and *It Happened Tomorrow* emerged as adroit, polished and tasteful entertainments, over whose impeccable surfaces, however, lingers a vague regret that they had not been directed, respectively, by Sternberg, Sturges and Wilder. Though not even



'Le Million'; 'Les Grandes Manoeuvres'.

Agee could work up any enthusiasm for *And Then There Were None* (1945)—he considered this semi-comic adaptation of *Ten Little Niggers* 'a smooth, cold, amusing show'—it's still the screen's most lifelike reproduction of Agatha Christie's two-dimensional world.

Clair returned to France in 1946, having forfeited through absence much of his former critical prestige. *Le Silence est d'or*, with Chevalier and François Périer (plus splendid old troupers like Gaston Modot and Raymond Cordy loyal in attendance), would have been even more delightful than it was had the silent cinema background meshed significantly with the conventional romantic triangle which unfolds before it. But it demonstrated Clair's enduring gift for encapsulating a relationship in one graceful, fleeting gesture: Chevalier, making a rendezvous with a *midinette*, scribbles his address on a cuff which he then nonchalantly clips around her wrist like a Cartier bracelet. In the film's opening sequence an unwilling patron, dragged by his wife into one of those fairground booths which housed film shows at the turn of the century, grumbles, 'But the cinema hurts my eyes', only to receive the unarguable retort, 'Well, keep them closed.' Excellent advice, alas, for prospective custom-

ers of either *La Beauté du diable* or *Les Belles de nuit* (1952), both dextrously scripted but visual eyesores.

Although *Porte des Lilas*, defended by no less a critic than André Bazin, managed to invest its trite material (a shambling, alcoholic drifter redeems himself by reluctantly gunning down the dashing but amoral young hoodlum whom he had befriended—a case of Lenny killing George rather than vice versa) with honourably *earned* pathos, Clair's best postwar work was unquestionably *Les Grandes Manoeuvres* (1955). From his own screenplay, it recounted a Maupassant-inspired episode in the amorous career of Armand de la Verne (Gérard Philipe), a young cavalryman garrisoned in a French provincial town who wagers his fellow-officers that he will seduce the mysterious Marie-Louise (Michèle Morgan) within the few weeks preceding the eponymous manoeuvres. Although three-quarters into the narrative the long foreseen estrangement occurs, the mortified victim learning of the hoax at the precise moment its perpetrator discovers the true depths of his feelings for her, the film ends, to one's surprise, neither happily (as Hollywood would have had it) nor unhappily (as Maupassant would have had it). When Verne rides out with his regiment, hoping in vain for his mistress to make an appearance at the window of her little milliner's shop as a sign of her forgiveness, we alone are permitted to catch sight of her surreptitiously observing his departure from behind a *half-drawn* curtain. What is so intriguing about *Les Grandes Manoeuvres*, beyond the fact that it must be the only film by Clair in which a genuine hurt is inflicted out of genuine, if unthinking, cruelty, is that the director's characteristic detachment could at this late date transform itself into a precision instrument for the drily Stendhalian dissection of his characters' sentiments. It may be that he was cunningly toying with our expectations: because the film's first half is played unequivocally as romantic comedy, its imperceptible shifting of gears into psychological drama is rendered doubly poignant (a word one never expected to apply to Clair's work).

Porte des Lilas, *Tout l'Or du monde*, *Les Fêtes galantes* ... and then there were none. Clair, the only film-maker ever to have been elected to the Académie Française (Pagnol and Cocteau, also Immortals, were primarily men of letters), his whole oeuvre now swamped by the onrush of the *nouvelle vague*, gradually retreated into the aristocratic obscurity where I encountered him, as it were, in the first paragraph of this article. *Utopia Ltd* is also, of course, the title of one of Gilbert and Sullivan's lesser-known comic operas; and it's to their works, rather than Mozart's, that Clair's cinema can fairly be compared, possessing as it did both Gilbert's wit and Sullivan's irresistible melodiousness. His was a limited Utopia, perhaps, but one without which no map is quite complete. ■

ROHMER'S SIEGE PERILOUS

Although a sense of poetry—the inimitable gesture, say, of one of John Ford's women shading her eyes against the sun—has long been acknowledged as a specifically cinematic property, no literary quality is necessarily implied. Indeed, with Abel Gance sounding the clarion call through his cry of 'The time of the image has come', the theorists of the first French avant-garde defined the distinction once and for all during the early 1920s: a film is not a novel or a play, and the cinema is not literature.

Literature, it was understood, must be transposed and reoriented so that literary conceptions of plot, character and setting would be conveyed in visual terms. Words became the bugbear, required to play only a supporting role, and the history of the cinema is littered with unhappy testimonials to various foredoomed attempts to graft on some measure of literature's verbal richness, from O'Neill's use of interior monologue (*Strange Interlude*) to Joyce's stream-of-consciousness (*Ulysses*) by way of Maxwell Anderson's high-flown theatrical verse (*Winterset*).

Other more satisfactory solutions have been achieved, of course, with the development of voice-over narration (from evocative description in *The Magnificent Ambersons* to subjective impression in *Hiroshima mon amour*), the essay film (Godard, Marker), and above all the matching of literary with visual preoccupations (Cocteau and Bresson in *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne*). Eric Rohmer, however, seems to be virtually unique in unequivocally proposing literature as cinema.

His first feature, *Le Signe du Lion* (1959), obeyed the basic rules of cinema in telling its tale of a man disappointed in an inheritance and gradually reduced to penury because the friends he might borrow from are all away from Paris on holiday. Although it could easily be transcribed as a novel, a diary of the hero's thoughts (or non-awareness) as he slips into both physical and moral degradation, Rohmer in fact *shows* the process. We watch as he worries over a stain on his only pair of trousers, later casually notes the flapping sole of his shoe, and finally comes to the point of no return when, a true *clochard*, he can make a shameful spectacle of himself without even noticing. Meanwhile, commenting on Rohmer's behalf, the streets and stone walls of the city close in, immuring him within their indifference.

TOM MILNE
writes about Eric
Rohmer's 'Perceval
le Gallois', which
apart from a 1979
London Festival screening
has yet to be seen
in Britain, and about
Rohmer's new film,
'La Femme de l'aviateur',
which is soon to open
in London.

By the time he came to embark on his six 'Contes Moraux' (1962-72), however, Rohmer's perspective had changed. Essentially a series of variations on a theme—each film deals with 'a man meeting a woman at the very moment when he is about to commit himself to someone else'—the moral tales elaborate a scheme which might be described as a literary conceit in which the theoretical spectrum of moral (or immoral) imperatives attendant upon the human triangle is geometrically proven.

Proustian in their concerns, these moral tales deal, as Rohmer has pointed out, 'less with what people do than with what is going on in their minds while they are doing it.' His characters consequently talk a great deal, probing delicately and obsessively into motivations, hesitations and clarifications, most notably in the Pascalian philosophical discussions of *Ma nuit chez Maud*. The result is uncompromisingly literary, yet never in any sense pretentious or verbose because Rohmer has understood that words can weigh equally with images *provided* that in the initial conception a proper balance is struck between cinema and literature.

This balance Rohmer achieves in two ways. At a time when the prevailing impulse among his New Wave colleagues was towards improvisation and analogous methods of investing actors with a

greater measure of spontaneity, and characters with a greater element of independent life, he elected to assume the all-seeing, all-knowing stance of the 18th century novelist who not only tells a story but, simultaneously and more importantly, comments upon it from a standpoint of ironical social observation. Not exactly puppets (they are too vividly alive to be so described), his characters therefore become manifestly subject to the urbanely witty, impeccably literary mind using them to enact its Olympian *jeux d'esprit*.

In *La Collectionneuse*, for example, a charmingly immoral girl roams St Tropez, every inch the spirit of modernity in her determination to sleep with a different man every night. Instantly assuming that she is eager to add him to her collection but adopting a superior stance to her availability, a young antique dealer (the past) conceives it to be his duty not only to resist for his absent fiancée's sake, but to reform the girl. He therefore tries, with boomerang consequences, to pair her off with an avant-garde sculptor (the future).

Perfectly worked out in naturalistic terms as well as in its past-present-future symbolism, the theme is orchestrated chiefly by the head-on clash contrived between two antithetical literary references: the emotional sterility of the thinking man's dandyism (the Choderlos de Laclos of *Les Liaisons dangereuses*) when faced with the simplicity of instinct (the Jean-Jacques Rousseau of *Emile*).

At the same time—and here Rohmer's literature becomes cinema—the teasing paradoxes of *La Collectionneuse* are set within, one might even say conjured by, the airy, inconsequential sensuality of an almost tangibly evoked St Tropez summer. Like Murnau, on whose *Faust* he wrote a doctoral thesis and whom he once described as the greatest of all filmmakers, Rohmer is intensely aware of the richly sensuous, almost magical properties possessed by natural landscapes. And if there is ever any danger of intellectual aridity in these moral tales, it is instantly dispelled by the way the settings are used to supply an emotional dimension of their own.

In *Ma nuit chez Maud*, for instance, the airy Catholic debate on choice, chance and the possibilities of purity in sexual relationships is undercut by a bleak commentary proposed by the snowy landscapes of Clermont-Ferrand. During the projected marital seven year

itch of *L'Amour, l'après-midi*, domestic interiors tranquil with familiar happiness give the lie to the illusion of adventure offered by bustling Paris streets alive with fantasy. And in *Le Genou de Claire*, a rosy celebration of the middle-aged mind's capacity to dwell not only on what might have been but on what might yet be, the setting—a lush green lakeside drenched by summer sun but ringed by snowcapped mountains—is a frosty reminder that nostalgia for youth means that old age is not so very far away.

In these films, in other words, Rohmer invites the spectator to attend to the intricacies of moral debate while a visual texture meantime gently caresses his senses with its own subversive intimations. And although *Die Marquise von O* and *Perceval le Gallois* seemed to herald a new departure after the completion of the 'Moral Tales'—a departure which one might characterise as the actual rather than the simulated adaptation of a period text—Rohmer in fact continued the exploration of his chosen path.

With *Die Marquise von O* there was no problem. Not only did Kleist's novella exactly echo the teasing spirit of the moral tales with its analysis of the social maelstrom stirred up by the discovery of an apparently immaculate conception, but Rohmer added his customary element of paradox through his use of décor: a series of classically serene, Empire-style interiors against which the romantic, or indeed Gothic passions of the principals rattled their brittle bones. *Perceval*, however, based on the late 12th century text by Chrétien de Troyes, was almost universally greeted as a disappointment, at best a whimsical exercise in the *faux-naïf* in its attempt to recapture the poetic simplicities of medieval faith, at worst an anti-cinematic blunder ranking with the silent cinema's Film d'Art and its *Assassinat du Duc de Guise*.

The most obvious difficulty lies in accepting *Perceval* himself (Fabrice Luchini) as a Rohmer hero, since his intellectual capacity amounts to zero. When we first meet him, a featureless rag doll wandering through a mini-Waste Land of metallic trees and toytown castles, he has been carefully schooled by his mother in ignorance of all but the splendours and miseries of Good and Evil, with knighthood condemned as the particular anathema responsible for the deaths of his father and brothers. Happening upon a small band of questing knights, and unable to reconcile the magnificence of their panoply with any demonic calling, he therefore confidently hails their leader as a logical subject for adoration: 'Are you not God?'

Yet beneath the more customary veneer of sophistication, such bland innocence is precisely the mark of the Rohmer hero. Whether juggling philosophical concepts or toying with literary conceits in proud expectation of a world obediently refashioning itself in accordance with their whims, characters such as those played by Jean-Louis Trintignant in *Ma nuit chez Maud*, or Jean-Claude Brialy in *Le Genou de Claire*, are invariably left amazed and chastened when



'La Femme de l'aviateur': Lucie (Anne-Laure Meury); Anne (Marie Rivière) and François (Philippe Marlaud); François and Lucie in the Buttes-Chaumont.

the world, going serenely on its way, hoists them with their own petards.

So too with the Perceval of Rohmer's film (and of Chrétien's poem), although he is a creature less of cerebral whim than of pure instinct. The naiveté with which Perceval at first approaches his chosen realm of knighthood—treated by Rohmer with a bland solemnity that is an enchanting equivalent to the homely humour of these medieval chansons as he wonders whether a knight is born in a skin of mail and whether he must therefore dismember an opponent in order to appropriate his armour—soon ripens into a more pragmatic appraisal. Kisses, he learns, are not to be snatched uninvited from blessed damozels, nor are defeated opponents to be summarily despatched, but rather spared if an oath of submission can be extracted.

Yet even as he approaches the ideal of a perfect gentle knight, well schooled in the rules of chivalry by the various mentors he encounters along his way, Perceval remains essentially unchanged. Like Trintignant bending Pascal's philosophical formulations to his own ends in *Ma nuit chez Maud*, or like Brialys borrowing a friend's literary creation in order to conjure a last sentimental adventure in *Le Genou de Claire*, Perceval simply weaves the precepts he is offered into the ever richer outlines of his original concept: that a knight is God.

In the simple theological terms within which Chrétien works, Perceval is therefore a body without a soul. And when vouchsafed a vision of the Grail at the height of his courtly fame, having casually forced a series of opponents to bow to his superiority while absently swearing devotion to a variety of damsels, it simply does not occur to him to ask the question which will unlock its mysteries, curing the Fisher King of his wound and restoring harmony to the Waste Land. At which point, laconically abandoning Perceval, Chrétien turns to Gawain (André Dussolier) for a sequence of adventures demonstrating the humility and humanity required, beyond combat and amorous skills, to make a true knight. Returning eventually to Perceval, Chrétien simply has the mysteries revealed to him first by a band of penitents, and then by a hermit, who explain that he must seek grace for his sins of omission (he has forgotten God) and of commission (he has caused the death from grief of his mother). 'Thus Perceval,' Chrétien abruptly concludes his story, 'took knowledge of the Passion and the Death that God suffered this Friday, and most piously partook at Easter of Holy Communion.'

As though aware that this end in received knowledge would be wrong not only for the creature of instinct that is Perceval, but for the essential innocent that is any Rohmer hero, Rohmer departs from Chrétien for a magnificent coup in which his Perceval finds himself actually suffering the Passion of Christ as protagonist in a mystic re-enactment of the Crucifixion. It is the final evidence of the senses, reinforced here by close-ups of blood spurting as the nails pierce

Perceval's feet and hands, that ultimately persuades all Rohmer's heroes to abandon the folly of their pretensions and accept the less glamorous but hard-earned truth of their daily lives.

As with *Die Marquise von O* and even his own 'Moral Tales', Rohmer's only claim here is to illustrate a text he has justly described as 'one of the most beautiful in all French literature'. Since the Old French in which this text was written is almost as incomprehensible (though not quite) to the modern ear as the Anglo-Saxon of *Beowulf*, his first obstacle was the task, seemingly insuperable given the dreary flatness of other currently available translations, of adaptation. In the event, rendered into rhyming couplets, Rohmer's version certainly captures the medieval poetic flavour better than any other translation since Joseph Bédier's splendid 'renewal' of *Le Roman de Tristan et Iseut*.

If a certain linguistic quaintness nevertheless threatens, it is promptly trumped by the sophistication of Rohmer's solution to the second major obstacle, this one posed by the setting. In theory, the circular stage with cyclorama sky which serves as an all-purpose wasteland, forest, sea and jousting-ground, studded here with trees shaped in a flourish of metallic curlicues, there with a dwarfish golden castle recurring in assorted guises as Perceval proceeds on his quest, looms as a nightmarish cross between Art Nouveau garden furnishings and Victorian practicable toys. In practice, however, this clash between archaic language and vaguely modernistic décor introduces a certain note of disorientation which Rohmer accentuates through the Brechtian device of having the actors simultaneously perform and comment upon the action.

The effect, with the chorus of musicians introducing a scene, then dispersing to become actors in that scene while the principals themselves take over the narrative even as they perform the actions (about to despatch a knight he has unhorsed, for instance, Perceval suddenly hesitates, turns to camera, and explains: 'He remembers how the man of care/Taught him a repentant knight to spare'), is curiously analogous to the technique of the medieval *romans* where the poet, only too well aware that his tale derives from a common fund of legend, would often describe events from a standpoint implying that of course everybody already knows what is to happen.

Carefully avoiding psychological interpretations, or the sort of metaphysical concerns which Bresson brought to *Lancelot du Lac*, Rohmer perfectly captures the fundamental naiveté of Chrétien's tale. Watching the film is in fact rather like watching the animation of a medieval manuscript, with the text gravely read aloud while the images—cramped and crowded, coloured with jewelled brilliance, delighting the eye with bizarre perspectives—magnificently play the role traditionally assigned to marginal illuminations.

Rohmer has explained in an interview with Gilbert Adair (SIGHT AND SOUND,

Autumn 1978) how, deciding not to use photographic means to achieve a flattened representation of the one-dimensional space of medieval paintings, he instead set out to use his single, semi-circular set to suggest the way in which the painted figures crammed into the illuminated capitals of a manuscript often seem to curve away from the edge of the frame. Actually, the effect of medieval illumination is carried more substantially by the constant clash in perspective whereby, riding up to a castle gateway on his charger, Perceval will seem to dwarf it into a miniature model until a maiden, very much alive and full-sized, appears at an upper window to welcome him.

But this single, curving set has two entirely beneficial side effects. One is that, as Perceval and Gawain pursue their adventures, manifestly returning again and again to the same point, it evokes the endless circularity of the quest for the Grail, whose mysteries, though known to all, remain ever obscured. The other, a fortuitous extension of the symbolism, accompanies such images as Perceval's first sight of the Fisher King, adrift in a boat on a 'sea' as dry and landlocked as when it served as a desert or a jousting-ground. In Chrétien, the sea is unequivocally a sea; here, however, an ambivalence persists, carrying with it the implication that the King, become a fisherman (and a fisher of souls) because his wounds mean he can no longer hunt, is marooned in a realm become so entirely an arid wasteland that there is nothing left even to fish for.

And the poetry? Well, it springs unbidden from a variety of sources. From the exquisite simplicity of such tableaux as the procession conducting the cup and the bleeding lance through the Fisher King's chamber. From the fragile, Madonna-like beauty of the faces Rohmer chooses as marginal illuminations to the action, like the damsel of King Arthur's court who is brutally slapped by a knight jealous of her prediction of pre-eminence for Perceval. Above all, perhaps, from moments fleetingly signalling the irruption of everyday life into chivalric artifice, such as the camera's marvelling track past the busy, bustling stalls in a marketplace, accompanied by a grave enumeration of the infinite variety of skills and wares on display there. Rarely has the absolute order and simple faith of the medieval world, tranquilly poised between the flesh and the spirit, been so exactly portrayed as in *Perceval le Gallois*.

With *La Femme de l'aviateur*, Rohmer is safely back on familiar territory, in a deceptively lightweight comedy so delicious that it promptly joins *Ma nuit chez Maud*, *Le Genou de Claire* and *Die Marquise von O* among his best work. The first in a new series entitled 'Comédies et Proverbes', manifestly intended to delve into a less urbanely sophisticated stratum, it deals with characters preoccupied less with moral casuistries than with more homely concerns. And in fact Rohmer opens it on a note of archetypal populism—post office workers, among

them the hero, busy at the Gare de l'Est sorting-office in Paris—which is faithfully echoed by a bitter-sweet song at the end, 'Paris m'a séduit, m'a trahi', celebrating the perpetual death and rebirth of illusions in the big city.

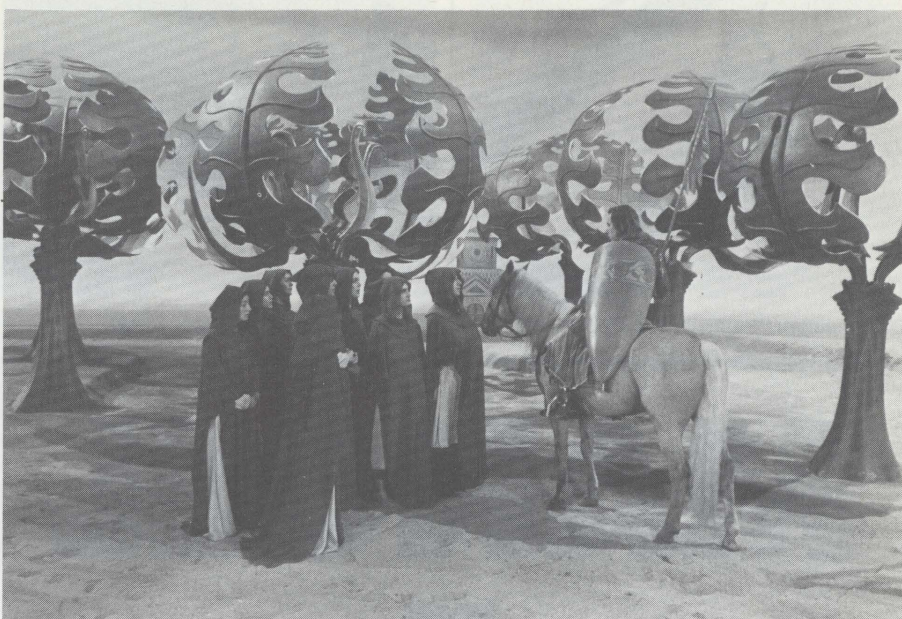
Although the plot is negligible enough to be almost non-existent, it is attended by such complications that some explanation is necessary. As the film begins, François (Philippe Marlaud), a law student who works nights at the post office, happens to see a man leave after pushing a note under the door of Anne (Marie Rivière), a woman five years older than himself with whom he is currently sleeping, their affair somewhat fraught by the fact that he works nights while she works days, and anyway insists that she prefers to live alone since she enjoys sole possession of her flat.

Suspecting correctly that the man (Mathieu Carrière) is the airline pilot with whom Anne enjoyed an affair three years earlier, but incorrectly surmising that his early morning presence at Anne's door means a renewal of the former liaison (in fact the pilot was announcing his decision to return to his wife), François impulsively begins to shadow the pilot. The trail leads to a park, where the pilot is accompanied by a mysterious woman and François inadvertently picks up a shadow himself in the form of a 15-year-old schoolgirl, Lucie (Anne-Laure Meury). Delightedly entering into the Holmesian spirit, Lucie constructs a red herring solution which nevertheless leads circuitously to the truth and—with her image still looming tantalisingly in the offing—to a precarious reconciliation between Anne and François.

Once again Rohmer is concerned 'less with what people do than with what is going on in their minds while they are doing it,' with the difference that his characters here, less dedicated to cerebral gymnastics than their predecessors, are less aware of what they are thinking, or even that they are thinking at all. But as the film's subtitle proverbially suggests, *on ne saurait penser à rien*: 'one can't think of nothing'. And it is this thought beyond thought, this feeling as yet unperceived, that Rohmer is concerned to elucidate.

This proverb is put into words (slightly different ones) during the climactic quarrel which leads to the reconciliation between Anne and François. Pressed for details as to how he spent his afternoon, but having just learned of the pilot's decision and the shattering blow this has dealt to the hopes Anne has forlornly nursed over the last three years, François realises that the one factor in his afternoon he simply cannot mention, though at the centre of his thoughts, is the pilot. For one thing, Anne is under the impression that the pilot has already left Paris: for another, confused as to the identity of the woman with the pilot in the park (actually his sister), François has been imagining an amorous intrigue which will further upset Anne.

François therefore insists that he isn't thinking about anything: 'Don't you ever think of nothing?' he plaintively pleads. 'No,' Anne replies, 'because that nothing



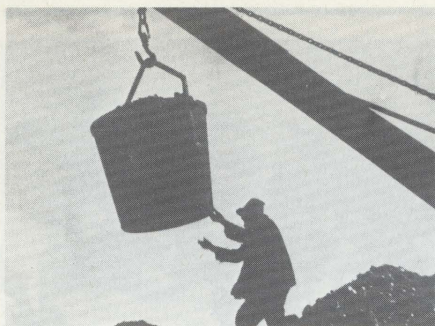
The absolute order and simple faith of the medieval world: Perceval (on horseback) and the land of metallic trees and toytown castles.

is something.' She speaks truer than she thinks, because as she coerces François into speech and he casually mentions his encounter with Lucie, Anne begins to uncover the 'something' of which he is still entirely unaware: the idea that he may, just possibly, be in the process of falling in love with the girl.

Probing areas that the characters themselves prefer to leave unknown and unexplored, *La Femme de l'aviateur* is endlessly perceptive beneath its casual surface, unerringly exposing the romantic attitude to love (with marriage) that lies beneath Anne's professed pragmatism, the unsuspected maternalism that enables her to deal sympathetically with the calfish devotion suffered by François, the entirely likeable woman underlying one who behaves throughout with a shrill and irritable selfishness barely excused by her unhappiness. With almost algebraic precision, but arriving at its equations through devious routes unknown to any mathematical formulae, *La Femme de l'aviateur* charts the progress of human aspirations from the sweet insouciance of fifteen (Lucie) to the ripeness for eternal love at twenty (François),

from the first intimations of despair at twenty-five (Anne) to the thirtyish yearning for comfort and security (the pilot).

But the delight of the film, the poetic *bonne-bouche* with which Rohmer sweetens the talkative pill for anyone likely to taste it as such, is the long central sequence in the Buttes-Chaumont park. In echo of *Le Genou de Claire*, there is first of all the sun, the greenery, the placid water. Then there is the teasing presence of a nymphet, around whom Rohmer builds an enchanted web of fantasy as his hero tries desperately to keep his original quarry in mind while the red herring persistently pulls in the opposite direction. Above all there is the faint adumbration of 'something', an infinitely precious something which Rohmer somehow manages to keep alive as less than a promise, more like a hope, over the drearily precarious compromise with which François and his sentimental life are confronted as the film ends. A letter, rounding off the populist motif that encloses the film, drops into a pillar-box. Sadly it puts an end—or does it?—to the adventure with Lucie that François has only just realised may have begun. ■



Documentary: 'Douro, Faina Fluvial', 1931.



Children's film: 'Aniki-Bobo', 1942.



Passion Play: 'O Acto da Primavera', 1963.

MANOEL DE OLIVEIRA

BY JOHN GILLETT

Critical attention has recently mushroomed around the work of the Portuguese director Manoel de Oliveira: comparisons have been drawn, remarkably, with Ozu, Buñuel and Dreyer, and he has been hailed as a European master. Oliveira is being 'discovered' late in life: he is now over seventy. But until screenings at film events in the last year, notably at the Berlin Festival's Young Forum in February, his work was hardly known outside Portugal. In July, most of his films can be seen in Britain for the first time at the National Film Theatre. This article is an introduction to Oliveira.

Even after taking into account our general ignorance of Portuguese film history, a look at Manoel de Oliveira's intermittent 50-year career suggests puzzles and unresolved questions. He was born in Oporto in 1908 (or 1910) and seems to have spent most of his life in business. He joined his brother in the management of their father's factory, dealing chiefly, it seems, in agricultural and industrial machinery. His interests, apart from film, included athletics and motor racing, for which he won several prizes. On meeting this tall, alert figure, who looks twenty years younger than his official age, one feels that his tense, rather reserved manner may disguise a Hawksian man of action. His words have the force and conviction of someone who has had to fight every foot of the way.

Oliveira's actual output over the years is sparse: less than a dozen shorts and documentaries and only six features (including the yet unreleased *Francisca*). Fastidiousness and a reluctance to compromise place him alongside other solitary film-makers, from Dreyer to Dovzhenko. But other factors, including the Salazar régime during the major part of his career and the baffled response of

the Portuguese industry, hardly encouraged productivity in an artist concerned to probe his own society. Furthermore, the extreme variations in tone, style and method from film to film mean that his work can't be pigeonholed and contained in the manner beloved of bureaucrats and critics.

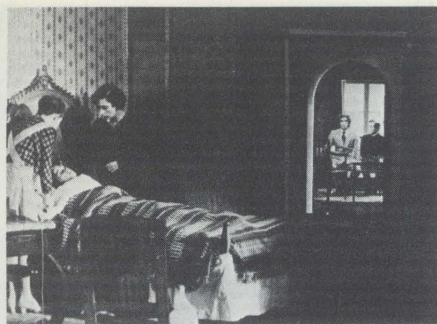
Oliveira began like the eager young cinéaste of tradition. He borrowed money for a 35mm camera and stock to shoot his first film *Hard Labour on the River Douro* (*Douro, Faina Fluvial*, 1931) in Oporto. Until recently, this was Oliveira's best known film abroad, probably because it relates to the familiar documentary tradition of Ruttmann's *Berlin* and the early Joris Ivens. Seen again today, it has all the vigour and self-awareness of a first film, nicely shot but somewhat overcut in an attempt to sustain a flow of meaningful, 'symphonic' images. It is also defiantly unromantic in its portrayal of poverty and deprivation, a fact which caused a rumpus at an international congress in the early 30s when Portuguese officials protested at a spectacle which showed such severe working conditions.

Other shorts from the 30s do not seem to have survived, but Oliveira continued to work in this field until the 60s (making several elegant art films), clearly marking time until feature projects could be realised. Although each lasts under half an hour, the two most significant shorts I have seen have the density of mini-features. They were virtually one-man jobs, Oliveira being credited with direction, script, camera, editing and collaboration on the sound.

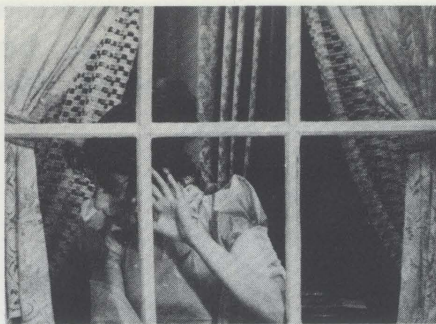
Bread (*O Pão*, 1959) opens with a shot of wheatfields in brilliant colour and then proceeds, without commentary, to enact a little parable on bread production. Small individual country bakeries merge into vistas of the big city, with factories at work (taking in witty shots of machines puffing and blowing out their sacks of flour), international corporations doing deals, people actually buying and eating the product. Finally, there is a slow regression back to the gleaming wheatfield. Throughout, Oliveira's associative editing is masterly, yet there is no forced didacticism. The film works most effectively as a kind of polemical poem, without words.

The short story film *The Hunt* (*A Caça*, 1964) also achieves its impact with a minimum of words. Two lads meet and lark about, causing some trouble in a village, and then attach themselves to a bizarre hunting party on nearby marshland. Suddenly the first boy becomes disturbed. Where is his friend? A frantic search reveals him up to his neck in a bog. From this point, the film erupts into panicky movement, with wild trackings as the boy races to the village for help, followed by sinister circling movements round the bog with the searchers framed in distant long shot. Finally, hunters and villagers (including a Buñuelian vagabond with a stump) form a line to pull the victim out, but the film ends before we actually see him retrieved alive. A parable about solidarity or an ironic attack on violence, as some Portuguese critics have suggested? Oliveira never quite tells us. His formidable camera eye, however, is used to sustain a mood of palpable disquiet.

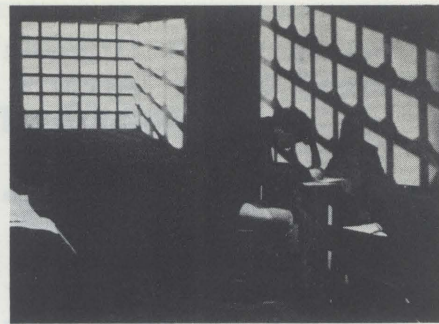
Oliveira's first venture into features was the children's film *Aniki-Bobo* (1942) with a lively young cast and much location shooting in the Italian style (one realises now, of course, that neo-realist tenets existed long before *Rome, Open City*). I have not seen it for several years, but memory tells me that it is less



Stage set: 'Benilde ou a Virgem-Mãe', 1975.



Television serial: 'Amor de Perdição', 1978.



Shadows and windows: 'Amor de Perdição'.

formally inventive than any of the later features. In fact, it was twenty years before Oliveira returned to feature production with *The Passion of Jesus* (*O Acto da Primavera*, 1963). In interviews, he often speaks of his progress towards an ideal fusion of documentary and fiction, and it is fascinating to see how the short films lead into this profoundly disturbing re-creation of the Passion Play, enacted outdoors by the people of Curalha during Holy Week.

The film opens in a rather static, theatrical style. Then Oliveira gradually increases tempo, camera movement and the actual texture and density of the images so that, as the Crucifixion approaches, the film ceases to be a mummery's play performed by willing amateurs and takes on a strange, ancient, hieratic force, far removed from its Christian roots or the commercialised representations of other cinemas. Oliveira's imagery, and he is again the cameraman, seems entirely at the service of these extraordinary village players, caught up in the drama and delivering the text in tones ranging from song to throaty declamation and high-pitched wailing. The film's importance in another context was expressed by the Portuguese critic Henrique Costa: 'What Oliveira portrays here openly, no one among us has ever dared to say. And I will go one step further. *The Passion of Jesus* is the first political film from Portugal—because what was done to Jesus was a political act.'

Nine years on, we arrive at Oliveira's most accessible film, *Past and Present* (*O Passado e o Presente*, 1972), which, if properly distributed, could have become a world success. Adapted from a play by Vicente Sanchez, the film is set in a bourgeois mansion ruled by the fickle Vanda, who drives her second husband to suicide only to be confronted by her first, who had been presumed dead. (Vanda is played by Maria de Saisset, an actress with perhaps the most withering look in all cinema.) The film begins with a marvellous mime sequence, accompanied by Mendelssohn's overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: the mood, which might suggest Buñuel, is later offset by a rich elegance of colour and design. Almost all the characters are motivated by lecherous, selfish and devious designs, facts not overlooked by the watchful servants, and this *Upstairs Downstairs* syndrome is exploited with a black, caustic wit.

Oliveira directs the cast with exemplary care, and his camera style uses mirrors, doors and windows to wondrous effect. Whether tracking through rooms or framing conspiratorial heads in tight close-up, the camera is the drama, dancing round faces and furniture, peering through keyholes and, in an inspired final shot, looking down on a quarrelling couple as they stomp up the aisle of a crowded church in search of empty seats. This rare amalgam of literate text, controlled ensemble playing, music (and silence) plus an all-seeing camera, produces a rich and heady feast. But Oliveira never loses grip on his characters, who are pinned with steely relish.

Whereas *Past and Present* waltzes through the proscenium arch, *Benilde: Virgin and Mother* (*Benilde ou a Virgem-Mãe*, 1975) stays resolutely within it, except for an impressive camera foray through wings and flats at the beginning and end, emphasising the enclosed nature of the main action. For many, this will be Oliveira's most difficult film: a literal transcription of a three-act play restricted to a stagelike set, with little camera movement and an unyielding pace. For Oliveira, the heart of the matter was the text by José Régio. It is set in the 1930s, with echoes of Ibsen, and concerns a young woman who, on becoming pregnant, claims divine influence. Her distressed bourgeois family, having failed to find a father, decide that she has lost her mind. But *Benilde* defeats them all by simply dying.

Oliveira saw in the play 'A well-characterised representation of a society marked by the moral values of its time, whose contradictions are inextricably linked with each other. They make the work, despite its peaceful appearance, really polemical, even dialectical—and the theme of love never goes out of fashion. *Benilde*'s religious problem is a complex, basic element. There are certain parallels with *Teorema*; in the latter the resolution is extreme, whereas in *Benilde* it is more reserved.' He also found that the text dictated a resolutely simple approach (the shadow of Dreyer and *Ordet* hovers nearby), without 'baroque flourishes'. But the tableaux are wordy and static, and inadequate translation was no help on a first viewing. I would rather reserve judgment until I have seen the film again.

Oliveira's most ambitious film to date, *Ill-Fated Love* (*Amor de Perdição*, 1978),

was shown at the 1980 London Film Festival, and is seen by its director as the third part of a trilogy on frustrated love. It runs some four and a half hours and was made originally as a six-part TV serial; as part of a financial compromise, the film was shot on 16mm with less than perfect technical finish. It addresses the audience on two distinct levels. The script is closely based on a well-known 19th century Portuguese novel by Camilo Castelo Branco, and voice-over readings from the text punctuate the film. But this sad, somewhat melodramatic tale of lovers parted and destroyed by feuding aristocratic parents and an unfeeling society is given, through a subtle and persistent sub-text, a social and moral evaluation of striking modernity.

Oliveira draws out the themes adumbrated in his earlier films by, on one level, the contrasting use of stylised plain exteriors and naturalistic, delicately lit interior scenes. His kinship with those directors mentioned earlier is also evident: a Buñuelian castigation of a society intent on suppressing love; and a use of lengthy set-ups and a precise distance between camera and object reminiscent of Dreyer. Curiously, Mizoguchi might also seem to have influenced Oliveira's use of the type of sequence shot which starts with a dialogue scene and a static camera and expands into movement.

The acting, mainly by non-professionals including the crew's chief carpenter, is remarkable for its simple gravity. The players seem passionately aware of the text, as were the villagers in the Christ film. In summing up this long and complex work, one is tempted to declare that Oliveira has perfected a new kind of 'meditative' cinema. Apart from one hysterical outburst by the father, the narrative develops on a subdued, almost matter of fact tone which nevertheless allows certain scenes deep poignance. A motif of vertical shadows and windows reaches an apotheosis in a prison scene shot entirely through the bars of a cell door. The final episode takes place on board ship, and a single shot encompasses the burial of the hero and the suicide leap of his lover, the servant girl.

The forthcoming *Francisca* has an intriguing link with *Ill-Fated Love*. Set at the turn of the century, it traces the story of the novelist Castelo Branco's own love affair with a girl of English origin. Oliveira's record suggests that he is bound to take the film into new and surprising territory.

Films shown in Granada's 'Camera' series will be screened as an 'Archive Night' programme at the National Film Theatre on 3 July.

CAMERA

ELIZABETH SUSSEX

Granada Television's recent series of seven programmes about early moving pictures opened magically with David Naden's film about the brothers Lumière: its first shot, an extraordinary evocation of the present through the past as those unsuspecting passengers step off the train at the little station of La Ciotat, seen seconds before, in colour, some eighty-five years later. It goes on in the same vein: the walls of the Lumière factory and that famous shot of the workers coming out, the Lumière château today and yesterday. The real walls, the actual shot—which is stranger? In juxtaposition like this, what do they mean?

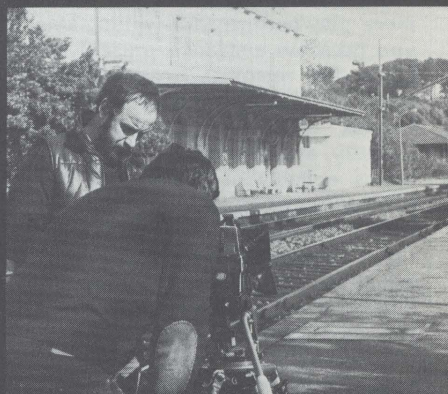
In one of the two American programmes directed by Mark Anderson, collector Karl Malkames used a 1908 camera to reshoot a shot made around the turn of the century and so prove how good the quality could have been at the time. Anderson describes what happened: 'We deliberately chose a fairly simple film that we could easily reconstruct, which was this pan up the Flat Iron Building. It's still there, it's recognisably the same building, and obviously the environment says, in a shot taken in 1980, that a lot has changed. So we filmed him filming this film... It was a very grey day as days can often be in New York City. There was a haze, and in the shot that he took for us (which was in fact panning down, whereas the original film panned up) it looked as though it was a black and white film. It was only when you came down to some grass and a bus that you realised it was in colour, which was a surprise bonus that we certainly couldn't have reckoned on.'

The surprise bonus, of course, has very little to do with a straightforward demonstration of the early technology. Like the 1903 shot of the New York waterfront that Anderson cut into his own long pan across the same scene today, it has to do with considerably more. But in this second case, the sense of wonder was virtually obliterated by a very busy commentary about the pre-Hollywood American film industry. The pressure to cram in as much verbal information as possible is the bane of documentary filmmakers working in a system that pays lip service to the idea of documentary but still largely refuses to accept or understand its language. People, I think, understand it. At Granada (as it was with my National Film Archive film at the BBC), the first response, the first feedback of enthusiasm came from the

engineers in telecine. Up in Manchester they were suddenly doing everything in their power to get transmission quality out of a tired old piece of film which they (and probably most of the eventual audience out there) particularly liked. The great thing about the *Camera* series is its constant preoccupation with the technical language, and delight in demonstrating its progress. 'You can't imagine this story having the same impact in any other art form' (James Wilkinson's *The Big Swallow*, 1901). 'But then the camera plucks up the courage to execute a pan—and suddenly we're into a classic, and very cinematic, chase sequence' (Will Haggart's *A Desperate Poaching Affray*, 1903).

The seven programmes, each well under half an hour in length, attempted to deal with, mainly factual, film from its beginnings until approximately 1910—a very restricted format by comparison with the thirteen earlier programmes on Victorian photography. What do you pick out? Where do you begin? A definitive choice of subjects had to be impossible. Between them producer Maxine Baker, executive producer Gus Macdonald and Granada chief Denis Forman settled on the Lumière brothers, Georges Méliès, Charles Pathé, two British programmes and two American programmes. Why a whole programme on Méliès? In theory it was logical enough: fact and fiction were then often inseparably intertwined, and Méliès' technical innovations had their influence. In practice the statement in the commentary that 'where the Lumière brothers recorded reality, Méliès transformed it' seemed to be in contradiction to what we had already seen (in the previous programme) of the Lumières' work. To transform reality in any profound sense, perhaps you have to start with it.

Film research for the series was extensive. Orly Ofra set off for the States a month before Mark Anderson to pick her way through masses of material that has probably never been in this country. Seona Robertson and Peter Broughan applied themselves to Britain and France. At the National Film Archive the *Camera* team probably saw more films of that period than anyone has ever seen before. Elsewhere in the country collections were scoured and appeals made for individual survivors already, as David Naden put it, 'long past their archive time'. There were many finds, some acci-



Top: the Lumière brothers. Above: the station at La Ciotat, 1895 and 1980. Right: the documentary image: Stockport Market and Ellis Island.

dental. A wall was actually knocked down and cans discovered at exactly the right moment to provide more films by Sagar Jones Mitchell and his partner James Kenyon, whose production set-up in Blackburn features as evidence of the small film-making centres that could crop up haphazardly anywhere in the country and were not the prerogative of Brighton. Robert Paul's *Christmas Carol* (1905) turned up in Wigan two weeks after Naden had settled for using a couple of stills from it instead. On the other hand no trace was found of George Albert Smith's now almost legendary *Delhi Durbar* in Kinemacolor. What about it, readers?

A lot of new material including three of G. A. Smith's Kinemacolor test films came from the late Graham Head, who, according to Naden, 'got very little



reward for years and years of keeping nitrate film under his bed.' These films were shot on a camera which had a shutter with a red filter and a green filter behind the lens, and had to be run at twice the then normal speed (i.e. at a speed of 32 frames per second) so that alternate frames got green filtered then red filtered light. When they were projected, red and green filters were placed in the shutter and synchronised with the appropriate frame. Run at speed, red and green merged. Naden's account of the effort to reconstitute this makes it seem small wonder that the material had not been shown in public for almost seventy years:

'We had to guess which had gone through the red filter and which had gone through the green filter. We tried to do it electronically by having a reference

red and a reference green and laying that on, but of course we couldn't get the speed right. We then tried using the computer, programming it to select one frame from the green filtered film and the next from the red filtered one ... This is all the magic of electronics: you have to run up ten seconds and then it clicks on one frame for you. Then it runs back on the other roll, runs up again and clicks on the next frame, and we build up frame by frame. We worked out in the end that if we were going to do a whole film like this it would take us about ten days on the computer or around £16,000 of company time. So there was really no way in which we were going to do it this way, especially as we discovered in the end we couldn't control it to 32 frames a second. We could slow it down but we couldn't get it to speed up because,

although with the slow motion (MPR) machines you can take it down to zero, you can't take it beyond 25 frames a second.

'So in the end we went back to the way movies used to be made, on film, and it was done in the optical department at Humphries, but what Bert Maiden did then was to take one frame from red and the next frame was a mix, half-red, and then he superimposed on top of that the green, so that when you run that at 24 frames a second you're getting the equivalent of 32 frames a second because every other frame has got a mix on it ... It's beautifully smooth. It's as good as any way, I would think.

'What is difficult then is to get the precise red and greens, the filter, to give you the quality as it was, because the projectionist had a variable area of green on the shutters of the projector. He used to run this strip of film through the projector on a loop altering the area of the sectors of red and green, in other words altering the intensity of it, until he got white light on the screen. So he could actually control the quality of the colour, which is something we couldn't do.'

Much of the Lumière material came from Dr Paul Genard, a dentist in Lyons who (because he already collected old film equipment) was given a large cache of little Lumière films discovered at the Town Hall when a brick wall was removed in the late 1950s. The cans, most of them only about 4 inches in diameter, had been deposited there by the Lumière brothers for copyright reasons. They contained original negative, still in perfect condition because of its high quality in the first place. The Lumières made their own film stock which had a better adhesive between the emulsion and the celluloid than anybody else's. Its superiority is clear to see in the *Camera* series.

Dr Genard and his museum committee gave access to more than films: unpublished letters, photographs, family contacts and so on. Louis Lumière (according to his grandson) particularly liked the music of César Franck. The photograph shown in *Camera* is the only one of Louis filming, and has never appeared anywhere before. The unpublished letters of a seventeen-year-old boy, Marius Chapuis, who went to Russia in the employment of the Lumières in 1896-97, provide new information beyond the scope of either the *Camera* series or this article.

The fact is that far more of everything from this period is lying around to be researched than I can ever begin to describe: the Charles Urban papers in the Science Museum; the fascinating story of Percy M. Smith; the vast hoard of virtually unknown 'documentaries' (reconstructed, poetic, educational, industrial, promotional, propagandist) made in America up to 1912. There are dozens of books to be written and films to be made about all this, and the *Camera* series must surely set off one or two of them.

Charles Urban, born in Ohio in 1867 and subsequently acquiring British nationality and doing all his pioneering



Méliès' celebrated version of the Coronation of Edward VII. An example of the 'fake' which was never intended to be taken as genuine.

work in Britain, seems to have been quite a step ahead of Grierson. I quote from the commentary: 'Urban fought to get factual films on the screen, and also persuaded Industry to sponsor them ... Urban's audience was mostly working class. He believed rightly that they would want to see themselves on screen, not just as background but as the central subject of factual films ... To the images of reality common to all the pioneers of cinema, he added an essential extra—a strong sense of public purpose ... Charles Urban gave support, and money, to anyone prepared to experiment with film.' After the 1914–18 war Urban, then back in America, 'founded the Urban Institute, a film library dedicated to Information and Education. "To entertain and amuse is good", his motto ran. "To do both—and instruct—is better".'

The things you first notice in the *Camera* series will inevitably reflect your own prior interests. Like all the best documentaries made for television today, the films have a richness that yields more on second (and even subsequent) viewings. This is in spite of the narration spoken by Gus Macdonald, of which there is generally too much. The idea of unifying the series by using the same voice throughout also seems to me mistaken. This is not a straightforward history of film but an examination of interestingly parallel themes in its development, with a strong emphasis on the biographies of individual people. It would have conveyed more of the flavour of the subjects to have selected voices suitable to each. George Fenton's music was composed with this in mind and on the whole works well, although I personally could have done with less of it. A moment's silence is hard won on television.

Something not sufficiently realised about these very early films is that they inevitably come to us out of context. There is very little concrete evidence about the music and narration that

accompanied them, or indeed the audience reaction to them. As Noel Chanan remarked, 'Cinema was not taken seriously in that way. It was a product of the fairgrounds, and didn't exist in cultural terms.' (After mentioning Lumière's discovery in 1896, *The Times* made no further editorial comment on cinematography for just over ten years. The only reference to it in *The Times* during that period was in a letter from Friese-Greene in 1904, claiming that he was actually the inventor.) The narrators who stood beside the screen and helped the films along by telling the story certainly improvised a good deal, but in any case no record survives of what they said. The catalogue descriptions, existing in the case of Méliès for instance, can only be regarded as providing the general outline.

Consequently, seeing these films today can only be a different experience from seeing them when they first came out: more like an amalgam of today and yesterday. We can look back, but we cannot actually go back. We can be fascinated by details that meant nothing at the time: 'Everyone was wearing a hat—all the men and all the women out in the street. Everyone always has a hat on,' Mark Anderson observed. We can be hypnotised by shots of people who broke the basic rule not to look at the camera: a man at the Melbourne races in 1896, some boys of ten or eleven who get between Edwin S. Porter's reverent panning shot and the solemnity of McKinley's funeral in Washington in 1901. There's something almost uncanny that most of us who have worked with it experience at some time in the presence of archive film. As Anderson put it, 'You're watching people who, because these films are that old, are presumably all dead, and there's a peculiar feeling that they are actually dead, but here they are—caught in 1896 or whatever—and to that extent they're still alive.'

Although it is impossible now to reconstruct the whole experience of seeing

these films when they were new, there are indications of an attitude of innocence quite strange to us, which the *Camera* team could demonstrate. The attitude relates to the proliferation of fake films of events then making headline news. Some were done with models: Albert Smith and Stuart Blackton's *Battle of Santiago Bay* filmed in an inch of water; the Edison company's tinted footage (specially re-tinted for our benefit) of the Mount Pelée volcano erupting; F. A. Dobson's reconstruction in miniature of the San Francisco earthquake, which apparently deceived that city's Mayor. Others were re-enacted in any suitable location nearby: James Sagar Mitchell himself playing the missionary in China in his *Boxer Attack on a Missionary Outpost*; Edwin S. Porter's re-staging of the execution of McKinley's assassin, shown in the same film as the genuine footage of the funeral cortège; Pathé's extraordinarily impressive *Battleship Potemkin*, which was on release only a few days after the actual event in 1905. (In his Pathé film Noel Chanan, perhaps inadvertently, enhanced this by having contemporary reports from the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times* read over it in order to show how accurate it tried to be.)

Mark Anderson, who included more of these films than anybody else, was particularly intrigued by their psychology: 'They seem to have had no compunction at all. If they couldn't film it easily for real they just faked it, and it's fairly well documented that quite a lot of what seemed to be quite genuine (even things like boxing matches) was faked. It didn't matter to them, and the people watching were so astounded by what they saw that the question of "Was it really for real, or apparently for real?" was too far back in their consciousness to be a problem ... As somebody who has made a number of documentaries, and endeavours normally to avoid faking things, I found this very interesting ...'

The faked films are not dramatised documentary as we know it. Dramatised documentary nowadays is like Franju's feature *Le Grand Méliès*, which Chanan used evocatively in his Méliès programme, at the same time acknowledging exactly what it was. The faked films are, however, extremely good examples of 'the creative treatment of actuality'.

The *Camera* series was not attempting to rewrite history, but it produced plenty of new evidence for ideas that most people have previously only read about. Obviously in order to do this properly it had to include the bad along with the good. Enough rubbish was briefly and entertainingly quoted (in the Pathé and Edison programmes in particular) to make me personally very thankful (what-ever purists say) to be seeing only a selection of it, and a beautifully edited selection at that. Compilations of this kind are documentary films which should stand in their own right, and these generally did. In David Naden's work especially, there was often a feeling of such harmony between then and now, such felicity in a developed art, that the pioneers would surely see their contribution to it with pride. ■



'On Moonlight Bay': 'What excuse do you have to offer before I report your case to the principal?'

DIRTY OLD NOSTALGIA

TOM MILNE

Difficult to review a book by an old friend (and fellow contributor to SIGHT AND SOUND), especially when the book in question contains a flattering reference to oneself. Difficult, that is, to claim impartiality, to be *seen* to be exercising Olympian detachment. Jonathan Rosenbaum's *Moving Places**, on the other hand, is a pretty subjective book. So maybe a touch of subjectivity in talking about it will turn out to be no bad thing.

Reading much of modern film criticism, especially the more hectoring kind, is rather like being back at school again. Do try to sit up straight, Tommy. Stop looking out of the window and pay attention. You may not be enjoying this but it's good. And what is good is good for you. Using the Pantheon syllabus as a guide, the new teachers dispense ultimate truths against which no argument can be tolerated. Beg to wonder whether some element in the arbitrary canon (say, Sirk and points East to Fassbinder) may not be open to doubt, and you score nought for film culture as surely as one used to in English composition for daring to start a sentence with a conjunction.

But, just as conjunctions sometimes urge their way to positions of prominence, so dissensions are sometimes radical enough not to wilt under the scorn poured on them. For instance, on the

strength of films as diverse as *Germany Year Zero*, *Vanina Vanini*, *La Prise de Pouvoir par Louis XIV* and *Socrates*, I am more than ready to acknowledge Rossellini as a major film-maker. Nevertheless, the problems I have with Rossellini's piety come to their most urgent head in a supposed masterpiece like *Voyage to Italy*; and nothing I have yet read on the film has been able to shake an uneasy conviction that, in detailing Ingrid Bergman's 'spiritual renaissance' through her perceptions of Italy, Rossellini is doing little more than conduct her (and us) paternalistically through a Sunday School Bible History class. Similarly, fond as I am of Howard Hawks, all the critical demonstrations in the world (not to mention fulsome references to Mozartian resonances) leave me unpersuaded that he is *that* much better than William Wellman, or half so good as John Ford.

A matter of taste, possibly; but also, I think, something more than that. I grew up on Ford (and to a lesser extent Wellman), whose films had created a definitive image of the West in my mind long before Hitchcock-Hawksian stirrings in *Cahiers du Cinéma* directed attention to the Hawks movies I had hitherto missed, put aside, or mildly enjoyed. These of course brought fascinating addenda and corrigenda to the Western map (as Peckinpah continued to do later), but never began to threaten the warm and secure pride of place held by Ford's films as a collective favourite

grandfather, who spun tall tales of how the West ought to have been rather than how it was, and who did so with such breadth and depth of vision that all factual and fictional correctives subsequently proposed were effortlessly subsumed.

Seen first as straightforward adventures—cowboys and Indians, good and bad guys—the great Ford Westerns underwent a succession of delightful transformations at each new viewing. It wasn't until glorying recently (for the umpteenth time) in *Wagonmaster* on television that I realised the extent to which, in this nonconformist hymn to the pioneer spirit, Ford had externalised his ballad structure with a series of devices that might almost be termed Brechtian. For instance, having turned down Elder Wiggs' bid to hire them as wagonmasters, Travis and Sandy (Ben Johnson and Harry Carey Jr) sit on the fence to watch as the Mormons start off across the prairie, taking with them the cute little redhead Sandy has had his eye on. Suddenly Sandy brightens and gives out with the first line—'I left my gal in old Virginny...'—of a song which Travis grins and promptly cues into—'... Fell in behind the wagon train...' And, two troubadours thus describing themselves as heroes of the ballad that is about to unfold, they race off in pursuit of the wagons.

The point I am trying to make here is that a film is not just a film, remaining immutable in all seasons and under all eyes, and subject to proof like a geometric theorem. The very act of viewing it introduces a variable factor, an unknown quantity, produced by the encounter between film and spectator (with the likelihood remote that any two spectators will elicit an absolutely identical encounter). Nostalgia, 'dirty old nostalgia' as Jonathan Rosenbaum has it, plays its part—with the vagaries of memory being particularly difficult either to define or control—along with education, upbringing, experience and predilection. And not all the objective correlatives provided by film theory, from signs and icons to structuralism, can entirely cancel out this subjectivity.

John Wayne, as Ethan Edwards, may have lent his iconographic presence to *The Searchers* in 1956. But eight years earlier, as Captain Kirby York in *Fort Apache*, Wayne was just another actor fast becoming a dead weight in a string of mostly dreary movies. At what point along the line between *Fort Apache* and *The Searchers*, stretching through *Three Godfathers*, *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, *Rio Grande* and *The Quiet Man*, did Wayne acquire this iconographic status? Can the moment where it happened, the particular film, be pinpointed objectively? Or is it a subjective perception and—if it is to be applied objectively—to what extent can it be assumed to function retrospectively?

This, couched in rather different terms—what happened to the kind of cinema which, in Hollywood's heyday, produced a collective, universal dream?—is more or less the starting point of *Moving Places*. A key segment of the book is devoted to a scene by scene

**Moving Places: A Life at the Movies* by Jonathan Rosenbaum. Harper and Row and Colophon, New York/\$11.95 and \$5.95.

evocation of the Doris Day/Gordon Macrae musical *On Moonlight Bay*, first seen by Jonathan Rosenbaum at the age of eight, then again at ten, and selected not because it was a particularly affecting experience but because it was a fairly average, if fondly remembered, one.

Starting from the intertwined threads of young Jonny Rosenbaum's secret delight ('You don't sing out loud along with the theme song, but you do sing along silently, secretly, to yourself ... It almost reminds you of some of the songs at Blue Star, the Jewish co-ed camp in the Blue Ridge Mountains where you went the two previous summers, the silly nonsense songs you used to sing at night around campfires ... all sounding warm and giving you something even warmer to take back to your cold cabin, regardless of what they meant or didn't mean') and the critic Jonathan Rosenbaum's disenchanted view after re-seeing the film in 1977 ('pure Disneyland wish fulfillment ... a routine Warner Brothers musical of the early fifties, only one of the many rip-offs or spin-offs of *Meet Me in St Louis*'), this description of *On Moonlight Bay* opens out into an astonishing variety of perspectives.

First, there are young Jonny's disappointed expectations when the musical's supposed source in Booth Tarkington's *Penrod* stories, familiar to him from readings by his father, turns out to be largely token (which leads to the perception of a certain broken-backed quality, not unnatural in a film about girlish romance adapted from stories about a mischievous boy). Then the intrusion of private feelings into the movie's world when Jonny, bored by the film's attempt to express Doris Day's moment of romantic heartache, instead finds himself moved, willy-nilly, by associated recollections of a teacher's inexplicable agitation while trying in class to explain the perniciousness of other Doris Day products by the dream factory ('They're not only trash, they make life look simple and easy when it isn't simple and easy at all').

Or again, the characteristic device with which the film opens: 'A small Midwestern town in 1916, possibly in June. Behind a succession of pink and green credits that they will never see, acknowledge or understand—a list of names and functions that fasten themselves to a Warner Brothers release, *On Moonlight Bay*, dated 1951—a family is seated in the dark parlor of a Booth Tarkington house, watching slides of themselves on a screen.' Here, of course, is the familiar, self-evolving image of the dream factory as a time machine, implying a community of concerns as one family watching treasured memories of itself is watched by other, presumed identical families. A notion given further turns of the screw for Jonny Rosenbaum as he watches Doris Day's father (Leon Ames) screen the slides in the family parlour, since his own father is a cinema manager and might be said to be showing *him* these same slides in the family movie-house; and for Jonathan Rosenbaum, who drily notes that the five privileged moments from this family album, enshrined in the slides projected behind the credits, have all been exhausted (and the plot

effectively concluded) with twenty long, dragging minutes still to go.

This final section of the film is in fact inspired, embarrassingly since the sentiments expressed have nothing to do with the reality of a Tarkington family on the eve of America's entry into World War One, by some fulsome flag-waving about Korea. Weakened by such miscalculations, by no means uncommon given the dream factory's perennial desire to wrap the well-tried old product in alluringly fresh packaging, *On Moonlight Bay* relinquishes all claims over the subconscious without too much argument (and none of the persistence of vision established earlier by *Meet Me in St Louis*). But what of another, considerably more traumatic experience offered to Jonny Rosenbaum in the same year, 1951, by *Bird of Paradise*?

'Polynesian postcard colours, lagoon and waterfall frolics, heaven modulating into hell as blood spills down the waterfall ... advancing as implacably and as abstractly as the red in Godard's *La Chinoise*; torrents of orange and red volcanic lava supplanting the blues and greens of the idyllic island and its serene, mysterious tribe ...' And, for Jonny Rosenbaum aged eight, translating 'all this arcane pseudo-Polynesian ritual into Talmudic threats' as Debra Paget sacrifices herself to appease an angry god by leaping into the volcano, a definitive crisis in his childhood Judaism.

What remains of *Bird of Paradise* for Jonathan Rosenbaum ('Ecstatic notions melted down from Flaherty's *Moana* and Murnau's *Tabu*, strained through the colour schemes of Disney and De Mille, the epic nature worship of Leni Riefenstahl and Esther Williams, into the lyrical cranes and pans of Delmer Daves') is perhaps only dirty old nostalgia. Yet even this is more, as he pertinently notes, than the legacy offered by 1952's *No Room for the Groom*, directed by Douglas Sirk, sacred cow of the 'liberal, up-to-date auteurist critic', and describing the sexual frustrations encountered by Tony Curtis in trying to bed Piper Laurie after marrying her on a GI leave. 'Had I seen Sirk's perverted hate letter to America in 1952 ... I might have giggled some, but it wouldn't have nurtured any dreams. The erotic interruptions of Sternberg's *The Devil Is a Woman* ... are conceived sensually, but *No Room for the Groom* is so mangy-looking that eroticism can be posed only on a hypothetical level before it gets cancelled.'

Moving Places, above all, is a voyage in quest of the secret magics and myths of the movies, using films like *On Moonlight Bay* and *Bird of Paradise* first as portals allowing limited access to 'the memory stains that form the surfaces and textures of one mind's entry into film, staking out the specifics of its desires, whether these be Terry Moore or MGM musicals or Lassie or Fernando Lamas, waterfalls or creeks or camera movements or pastel colours.' Then as guides, whose faltering footsteps into the unknown are quickly left behind as new and complex paths begin to take shape, with *Gertrud*, *Sunrise* or *Playtime* looming as the mysteriously attainable grails.

And finally, as wraiths rendered virtually obsolete by the trend to shopping precinct cinema and films like *Apocalypse Now*, 'a complex pleasure machine, loads of fun, programmed to stimulate and then gratify as many opposing viewpoints as possible.'

The best description of Rosenbaum's twin odyssey, in search of himself as defined by cinema and of cinema as defined by him, is offered by his father, cinema manager turned academic, who sees it in terms of three-dimensional chess. The game, appropriately enough for a book constructed in the shadow of William Faulkner (and better written than any other film book I can call to mind), opens on the road to Faulkner's home in Oxford, Mississippi. The first (and oldest) of four distinct Jonathan Rosenbaums, whose minds will overlap in brief encounters over the years covered by the book, notes that part of the route 'might approximate the pregnant journey of Lena Grove on the opening pages of *Light in August*', and proceeds to delineate the connection with cinema.

'First, the car's languid progress up and down a straight road flanked by forest: a trick of suspended time, pure movie and pure Faulkner. Then the hot moist afternoon light filtering through the branches into a milky pool of delicate focus, like the last scene in Carl Dreyer's *Gertrud*, making it easy to imagine in a tactile, even in a carnal way why Dreyer wanted to adapt *Light in August* ...' A sense of exact, evocative rightness in the description here is abruptly terminated as Rosenbaum continues, 'Could anyone else film the novel? I recall my lunch with Orson Welles in Paris five summers ago when he talked mainly about literary adaptations ...' Cooling perceptibly, faintly embarrassed at having been caught listening to name-dropping pretensions, one reads on; and 176 pages further on, after nearly two-thirds of the book has passed by, this 'casual' reference to Welles is revealed to be a very studied one, designed to indicate the ways in which, by picking up on and deploying 'inside' information, Jonny Rosenbaum of Florence, Alabama, was learning to become Jonathan Rosenbaum, international film critic.

Where the three-dimensional bit comes in is the unpretentious ease with which *Moving Places* swings back and forth in time and place, between fact and fiction or life and film, positing strange alliances and conflicts between history, geography and the personal character of a boy who had the biggest electric train set any child could wish to become a passenger on at his entire disposal (his grandfather operated a chain of movie-houses in Alabama which became his playground), who grew up in a house designed by Frank Lloyd Wright (its horizontal perspectives incalculably influential, perhaps accounting for predilections for CinemaScope and Ozu), who was a Jew in the South (and came to a slow confrontation with the Jim Crow ethos during the time of the civil rights marches). Asking all sorts of not always comfortable questions about dirty old nostalgia, *Moving Places* is wise enough to know that it can never simply be ignored. ■

JOHN HUSTON

The first chapter of John Huston's recently published autobiography, *An Open Book*, contains the following paragraph: 'My life is composed of random, tangential, disparate episodes. Five wives; many liaisons, some more memorable than the marriages. The hunting. The betting. The thoroughbreds. Painting, collecting, boxing. Writing directing and acting in more than sixty pictures. I fail to see any continuity in my work from picture to picture—what's remarkable is how different the pictures are, one from another.'

On the eve of the English publication of the book I went to interview Huston in his home on the Mexican coast. He told us the following story, too long, alas, for the brisk pressure of television packaging and, in any case, recounted in his generously discursive manner, too long for anything but a book. Some three or four years ago he had leased a plot of land from the Mexican Indians who own that part of the coast ten miles south of Puerto Vallarta. He had cleared it and, with local help, built a few single-storey structures, more than huts, less than villas, on the slope overlooking a little sandy cove: Las Caletas.

There was no way in except by sea. He did without a telephone, and communi-

BY GAVIN MILLAR

cated with the outside world by two-way radio. The land was to revert to the Indians, with the property on it, after ten years. He was fond of and kind to the Indians, some of whom became his house servants, and he lived with a young Mexican girl (the only valuable he had saved, he says, from the wreckage of his last marriage). The locals knew him as a famous man from the outside world, but also as a lifelong lover of Mexico. He discouraged casual visitors but he was honoured apparently by the visit one day of one of Mexico's most notorious bandits, who had come to pay his respects.

Fortunately, says Huston, he was away from home at the time, for he was not sure that this was the kind of visitor he should encourage. The man was an important figure in the drug-smuggling industry, one of Mexico's staples. One day a new chief of police was appointed in Puerto Vallarta and had let it be known that he was coming in with a new broom. Bandits and outlaws like x—would not henceforth be allowed to continue their dishonourable careers with impunity. x—was inclined to regard this pronouncement as satirical, but to be sure, he came down from the hills one morning and walked into the police

station as bold as brass. This is one of the most wanted men in Mexico, Huston points out, a certain amount of amused admiration showing in his face. He proceeded into the chief's office, brushing aside armed guards, and put it to him that this *pronunciamento* was, just between the two of them, a bit of window-dressing, wasn't it. No, said the Chief of Police, integrity and a sense of grave responsibility creasing his brow, it most certainly was not. He meant every word of it. Whereupon x—, without more ado, drew a revolver and shot *el Jefe* at point blank range between the eyes, turned on his heel, walked out and rode back up into the hills. He had not been seen again until the day he turned up at Las Caletas to pay homage to the absent Huston.

The obvious lessons to be drawn from the story include: what qualities in Huston did the outlaw admire? Just his fame, or his *macho* image, or some air of raffish glory that attaches to the man, his reputation for taking risks, for the gamble that stakes all, for going *jusqu'au bout* (the quality that Jean-Paul Belmondo admires in Humphrey Bogart in *A bout de souffle*)? It was Huston who helped create Bogey's image—until *Maltese Falcon* Bogart was hardly more



than an uncomfortable tough playing second fiddle to Cagney or Edward G. Robinson at Warners. Huston brought out the humour in Sam Spade, and Bogart clung to that stoicism and latent tenderness in all his best parts subsequently. But as Huston admits, the real Bogart was nothing like his screen image. Spending weeks up-river with the unit on *African Queen*, diving under the boat, getting covered in leeches, roasted and drenched by turns, was not his idea of heaven. 'He preferred the luxuries of his house in California,' says Huston. 'But he made no complaints.'

Is it the case therefore that the Bogart image is much closer to Huston than to Bogart? Bogart had been known to take a crack at someone in a restaurant, especially if he was insulting Betty Bacall. But he was not a fighter, not a tough guy, on the scale of Huston. When Huston overheard Errol Flynn at a party insulting Olivia de Havilland, he invited Flynn quietly to step outside. It was apparently no mere cock-bird display. The two men retired to the bottom of the garden out of sight and fought 'for the best part of an hour'. There were broken ribs and broken noses. Each of them went to hospital—different hospitals,' Huston chuckles. In the book he records how he was knocked down several times very quickly, but then 'I began to get my licks in.' The relish of euphemistic slang is very Bogart, as is the display of courage and stoicism in defence of honour. And what kind of world does it describe when we learn that the two men enjoyed the fight, rang each other up afterwards to compare injuries, spoke of repeating the experience (for which Walter Huston suggested they sell tickets), but the world of Huston's best films?

These personal anecdotes are not irrelevant to a weighing up of Huston's film work since the two are so closely bound together, and indeed it may be part of the pleasure of the work that so much of his personality has seeped into it, lightening mediocre melodramas, raising finer work to the level of masterpieces. If he can see no continuity in his work it may be easier for others. The continuity is, as much as anything, his character.

How many of his heroes, if that is not too glamorous a word, would this description fit? A low-life adventurer, somewhere between criminal and respectable, setting out on a near-hopeless quest with unquenchable hope, courage and tenacity, aiming to raise himself, by mere physical progress, into some sphere of spiritual exaltation, perhaps kingship, perhaps even divinity? Add one rider, that the protagonist does not always aim so to raise himself. He often has no insight into his own aspirations. Thus Dravot (Sean Connery) in *The Man Who Would Be King*, in all his dreams, can see no more glowing apotheosis than to stand, rather than kneel, in front of Queen Victoria as an equal. Billy Tully (Stacy Keach) in *Fat City* thinks he wants to be a champion, when his greatest achievement is, in reality, to survive. Much of the irony and pathos of *Sierra Madre* comes from our appreciation of the gulf between those with

insight and those without: Walter Huston knows what sort of quest they are on, Bogart does not. It is a question which of them Huston himself admires, for of course the films in which only the director is conscious of the hero's aspirations enjoy the richer dramatic irony. It seems likely that he admires the old man's seasoned shrewdness, but is touched by the desperate relentlessness with which Bogart pursues his worthless dream. If there has been a progression in Huston's more personal films it might be towards closer and closer identification with the torch-bearers of lost causes.

In view of Huston's personal qualities, and personal achievements, this is itself an endearing trait, for the mark of his attention has been its lack of patronage or sentimentality. There can be few working directors who have won spurs, or demonstrated potential, in so many other spheres. He speaks himself of his hunting: he was both a crack shot and a fine horseman. The Mexican cavalry made him an honorary lieutenant for the pleasure of having him ride with them. He was a young champion boxer in California (a fact which he bore in mind when squaring up to Errol Flynn—but then he had to remember also that Flynn was a 'fine athlete and a good boxer; he knew how to handle himself and had some twenty-five pounds of weight advantage'). He won and lost what most of us would regard as fortunes at the table or at the track: his third marriage more or less broke up as a direct result of his wife's failure to place a winning bet for him. He was a noted collector of and expert in Pre-Colombian Art. Painting was his first love and he gave it up only because he was not sure of making a comfortable living at it. H. L. Mencken, no less, published his first short story and later encouraged him to give up the trivial business of movies and concentrate on his real gift, writing.

Mencken compared him to some American authors so grand that even Huston's lack of false modesty stutters to reveal names. He would not do so after close questioning and promises to keep it off the record. The impression was not that it would make us laugh, but that it would have an inevitable air of boastfulness about it. In the light of the myriad other names that Huston had no scruples about dropping, this began to seem like a testimonial Tolstoy, Stendhal, Joyce and the boys might have been happy to get. Huston would have found the gold in the Sierra Madre, lost it to Walter Huston in a poker game, won it back in a duel and given it to Humphrey Bogart, who would then have shot him. Huston would have survived.

This catalogue of gifts takes no account of his gift for attracting women. It was Marilyn Monroe who said 'No woman can be around him for long without falling in love with him.' He confessed to us the failure of his attempt to involve himself with Ava Gardner, who worked on *The Night of the Iguana*; but that may be partially explained by the fact that she was heavily preoccupied with beach boys and he was not only married but in company with a beautiful Anglo-Iranian girl much his junior. No, in the

matter of gifts the gods bestow, one is tempted to echo Dravot's conclusion in *The Man Who Would Be King*, 'More than chance has been at work here.' Except that Huston himself appears not to believe in destiny and certainly not in any religion or divinity shaping our ends. As an inveterate gambler, chance is rather his god, and the emotional drive and destination of his best work derives from a kind of wry pity for chance's victims and a respect for the way they fight back against the hopeless odds. Perhaps his interest in the derelict and the defeated, his fascination with the outcast, the misfit and the socially unacceptable springs from an unacknowledged fear that there but for the grace of—what? chance?—goes he.

In many ways the hero of *Wise Blood*, Hazel Motes (Brad Dourif), is the ultimate Huston protagonist. He manages to do what Ahab was trying to do in *Moby Dick*—beat the devil. Hazel, as fierce as a zealot in his thirst to prove God does not exist, beats the powers of darkness by withdrawing from the world altogether before they can make him do anything to compromise his mistrust of it. What is extraordinary in *Wise Blood* is that Huston can find sympathy for, affection even, and indeed tragic dimensions in, someone so completely in the line of his typical subjects, and yet so utterly alien to his own character, personality and experience. Hazel is a self-driven derelict with no insight whatsoever into his motives or his aims—in that respect he is mainline Huston. But for the first time in his work the Huston misfit drives himself, comically, or tragically, not towards survival, but to extinction. At the point of death, the life of the film, the responsibility for survival at all costs, passes to Hazel's distracted landlady Mrs Flood, who takes delivery of the body from the police. She cossets and comforts the lifeless form as though there were something still left to preserve.

In a way of course she is right. In Huston's book, life, or even just the appearance of life, must be preserved at all costs. Who knows, some spontaneous regeneration may occur. As Mrs Flood fusses over the inert remains of Hazel Motes, who knows what flicker or spark her care, faith or passionate blindness might stir into life? That at any rate is the feeling, against the evidence, that Huston manages to distil. The villains are always the truly faithless, the cynical, the pragmatic, the manipulators. Asa Hawks (Harry Dean Stanton) and Hoover Shoates (Ned Beatty) are the devils to beat. The one a fake hell-fire preacher, fake blindman, fake mutilee, the negative image of Hazel, professing belief in a god he mistrusts while Hazel goes to his death, blinding himself and mutilating himself in the process, denying an undeniable belief in a god who does not exist. And on a lower, comic plane, but no less disapproved of, Shoates exploits loneliness and fear by manufacturing fake prophets and selling them at street corners like balloons, or like the monster gorilla Gongga, a fearsome mythical beast if you like, or a



'Wise Blood': Gonga, 'mythical beast ... or down-and-out in a tatty skin'.

down-and-out in a tatty skin who needs a few bucks.

Huston offers in *Wise Blood* the most sophisticated commentary yet on his range of consumer philosophies, and the scale of his moral ratings is easy to read. But the effort of extending the range in such a complex way has unbalanced the tone and voice of the film here and there. The first difficulty must have been to master the bizarre flavour of Flannery O'Connor's original, that mixture of horror and farce, blind faith and shrewd disbelief. There are rocky moments in the film when the switch from one to another appears to expose areas of dead feeling, of heartlessness even, instead of the painful comedy, or the pitiful farce, at which he must have been aiming.

Huston spoke to us about the attraction of the novel. 'She has that ability to combine the ludicrous, the uproariously comic and the dreadful and terrible so that they're together there on the screen before your eyes at the same time. They don't go from one to the other for relief. It's a rebellion against Christ except that unlike Ahab he's not able to carry it through and it destroys him. But in telling the story, why, it becomes marvelously funny, even funny when Hazel puts his eyes out. That's hard to do.'

Indeed it is, and I am not sure that even Huston pulls it off. He lets the scene run only on Sabbath Lily Hawks (Amy Wright), Hawks' devious daughter and would-be seducer of Hazel. The off-screen Hazel is suffering silent agonies in the bedroom while Sabbath Lily flees back and forth shrieking from the room to the top of the stairs from where she screams down to us and to Mrs Flood, 'He's blinded himself, he's blinded himself.' It is a brave attempt to do something unimaginably hard, but it fails to reach out far enough in both directions at once, towards horror and comedy, and we are left with little more than a pained smile. But at its best *Wise Blood* goes so much further and so much more successfully than *Moby Dick* that one has to be grateful for the effort made and ignore the shortcomings.

Perhaps *Moby Dick* missed the tragic dimensions of Melville's portrait of blasphemy, of Ahab's battle against the

Demiurge (or perhaps his attempt to usurp the Demiurge), on no more substantial grounds than the central weakness of Gregory Peck's performance. This is an Ahab with a bad headache rather than a man with a vision of horror burning inside his skull. Yet Huston was happy with Peck and continues to defend the playing to this day. Can it be that Huston himself has no vision of horror, and chooses his picaresque subjects precisely to avoid epic echoes? Is he a man who wisely made *The African Queen* rather than, say, *Heart of Darkness*? Tragedy, in Huston's work, may perhaps have to have a constant accompaniment of farce to make him comfortable with it, and it may be this wilful deflation that has prevented him, often, from being taken quite as seriously as his gifts should have merited. That, and his unfair impersonation of the gilded youth whom the gods favoured with looks, money, women, and more talents than seems equitable. No one is immune from jealousy, not even film producers or film critics.

If you think of the victories of his losers, they are the result of rebellions profoundly shaking to their perpetrators, but trivial in the eyes of the world. Ahab's obsession, after all, is childish. Rose, by quiet persistence, injects some of her indomitability into Allnutt in *The African Queen*, and his roguishness softens her primness. But Huston carefully avoids the suggestion of larger dimensions: even the skirmish on the lake is presented as little more than a storm in a teacup in which a few humourless Huns perish. *The Roots of Heaven* can be read merely as an early ecological plea. *The Night of the Iguana* rescues a whisky priest and restores him to life in the arms of the whimsically sensuous Maxine (Ava Gardner), a redemption which can only be viewed as parody. Huston is skilful here in turning some of Tennessee Williams' steamier and symbolic absurdities to comic account. Even *The Misfits* saddles him with a baldly allegorical foursome whom he proceeds, quite rightly, to undercut and deflate in defiance of the script. 'The gift for life' which Gay and Guido spot in Roslyn (Gable, Wallach and Monroe) is a value

which Huston treasures, but would never phrase with such pompous rhetoric.

Leonard Gardner's script for *Fat City* still seems the vehicle most suited to Huston's tastes and gifts. The story of an ex-boxer and a failed comeback, set in a tough town and its skid row, seems almost a parody itself of Huston's familiar stamping-ground. Yet he avoids parody all round, avoids farce too, and in enjoying every comic opportunity, brings home triumphantly the most controlled tragedy he has made. Stacy Keach's Billy has the insight of his inevitable defeat only by fits and starts; flashes of the truth crumple his battered features into resignation even while he is summoning up the blood for another assault on the title, the bottle, the girl. So we are caught, with Billy Tully, on a hopeless switchback, knowing, a little more clearly than Billy, that however often it goes up, it will inevitably, finally, come down. 'Don't waste your good years,' Billy advises his protégé Ernie (Jeff Bridges), not realising that he has wasted his own and that Ernie is never going to have any to waste.

What Huston admires in Billy is his ability to keep the dream going, even if he has to find a poor old Chinaman behind the counter of a coffee-shop to pity and so give himself a little shaky, threadbare self-respect, the Dutch courage to carry on living. 'What a waste,' he tells Ernie, looking at the old man. 'How would you like to wake up in the morning and be him?' Ernie looks covertly over his shoulder at Billy and reflects on how it would be to wake up in the morning and be Billy. Huston, and we, watch both of them and reflect on how it would be to wake up in the morning and be either of them.

Antonioni once spoke of the ending of *L'Avventura* distilling an emotion between the two lovers akin to 'a kind of shared pity'. Few of Huston's protagonists have the insight or the care to share their pity with one another. They are too damaged, or too defeated. But at his best, presenting a world of victims of which he has gloriously not been one, he shares his pity for them with us, without sentimentality, and without patronage. Indeed, he invites us to share his admiration.

He is resigned to the pictures he likes best and is most proud of (which include *Reflections in a Golden Eye*) having no great popular success. He is happy to tell us that Ray Stark is more proud of *Fat City* than of any of his more glittering successes. Despite Huston's refusal to see a continuity, he admits the recurrence of a theme and an emotional commitment. 'But I'm not sure,' he smiles wryly, 'that people care very much about the spiritual processes of the defeated, those who are beaten, and yet unwilling to admit defeat. That doesn't mean to say those films don't have a happy ending. If the spirit soars ... gloriously ... then that suffices.'

An Open Book by John Huston, Macmillan, £8.95.

FILM REVIEWS

One elephant, two elephant

That Sinking Feeling and *Gregory's Girl*

Gilbert Adair



Cookery class: Susan (Clare Grogan), Gregory (Gordon John Sinclair) and Steve (William Greenlees).

Bill Forsyth's second film, *Gregory's Girl* (ITC), is set in and around a pleasant comprehensive school in a New Town near Glasgow. Early on, while our attention is focused on foreground activity of some import to the plot, a small boy in a penguin costume is glimpsed wandering along one of its corridors, before vanishing as abruptly as he appeared. What that capsule description omits, however, is the almost subliminal level at which the gag properly functions: though our immediate perception is of a penguin, albeit an oversized one, our laughter is provoked less by its incongruity than during the fraction of a second which elapses before we conclude that, under the circumstances, it can only be a disguise (perhaps for an end-of-term play).

Later, apparently lost, the penguin resurfaces to be directed by the headmaster to the classroom where his presence is mysteriously requested. At which point, we may already suspect that the penguin's identity and *raison d'être* are forever to be withheld from us. But what we are unlikely to anticipate is that he will make a third appearance, one which by exactly duplicating the particulars of that preceding it—the by now forlorn wee creature is steered once more towards his elusive destination—would seem to be breaking a basic rule of visual humour. Yet the effectiveness of the joke this time paradoxically depends on our failure to respond to it as such. For we have come to accept the penguin as a

familiar and even reassuring element of the school's curricular routine: that he is no longer funny is funny.

If I have made so much of a single gag, in a film crammed with gags, it's not merely for the pleasure of reminiscing about it in print but also because, within its modest narrative framework, *Gregory's Girl* strikes me as a well nigh flawless comedy, and perfection is a much trickier concept to come to terms with globally than in an isolated detail. For this reason, the delayed release of Forsyth's first film has served at least one purpose, that of clearly demonstrating the distance since covered by its director.

That Sinking Feeling (GTO) deals with a group of Glasgow slum urchins who, faced only with the disheartening prospect of no prospects ('There's gotta be more to life than committin' suicide'), devise a foolproof plan to burgle a local plumber's warehouse of ninety stainless steel sinks. And, for a first film, it boasts an extraordinary variety of comic tropes: running jokes (the addiction of the scheme's begetter to cornflakes, inside a bowl of which he contemplates drowning himself); exquisitely timed bathos (two of the plotters warily clam up until the tiniest of tiny tots has waddled out of earshot); verbal non sequiturs (when, during the heist, one of the gang claims possession of a gleaming new lavatory pan, he is promptly ordered to return it as, for some unfathomable reason, 'These things are too easily traced'); and a few

Tatiesque visual rhymes (two youths who appear to be indulging in fisticuffs are in reality attempting to ward off a swarm of marauding bees).

A pity, then, that its too frequent lapses into nudgingly facetious whimsy, already foreshadowed by an arch (and not very original) mock-disclaimer that the Glasgow setting should not be confused with any real city of that name, tend to swamp the more delicate *trouvailles*—most notably on the subject of role reversal which, developed in *Gregory's Girl*, would seem to herald the inception of a Forsythian *thématique*. In order to distract the warehouse's night watchman, two of the gang have to masquerade as coyly simpering charladies, roles into which they slip with disturbing ease. But because of an excess of repetitive vaudevillian mugging, the ensuing imbroglio—the watchman's flirtatious attentions to one of the decoys arousing in the other all the fury of a female impersonator scorned—quite dissipates the potential of that ambiguity, and the scene is reminiscent of an indulgently off-colour skit in a school concert.

Gregory's Girl, however, manages to invest the same theme with both humour and resonance. Dorothy, the gorgeous centre forward, initially catches Gregory's eye as much by her dribbling skills as by the way her pawky *volupté* is displayed to advantage on the soccer field; and when her goal-scoring is greeted with the traditional sweaty embrace from the (otherwise all-male) team, he mutters 'Perverts!' from the goalmouth. In direct contrast is the treatment of Steve, Gregory's confidant, whose knack for pastry-making ('The doughnuts are selling like hotcakes!') and apparent indifference to either sport or girls set him slightly apart from his more boisterous chums. When asked by euphoric Gregory if he has ever been in love, Steve, visibly trembling on the brink of a revelation (and perhaps of self-realisation), is rescued only by the garrulity of his friend's own amorous discourse. Forsyth's not inconsiderable achievement here, aided by a remarkably sensitive performance by William Greenlees, is to have created a character no less perplexed by his sexuality than is the spectator.

But the whole film is enhanced by these modulations from the overt to the latent, or between what Lévi-Strauss termed 'the raw and the cooked', in a manner comparable to, and worthy of, early *nouvelle vague*. The slender but affecting storyline—Gregory, at first infatuated with Dorothy, is slyly shunted from schoolgirl to schoolgirl till he falls straight into the arms of Susan, the one determined to hook him from the beginning—possesses much of the lapidary elegance we associate with Rohmer's *contes moraux*. Though Forsyth's social observation is far cannier than Truffaut's (he makes wonderfully evocative use of Scottish faces, landscapes and such assorted miscellanea as apple slab, Irn-Bru, san'shoes and Partick Thistle), it's possible to be reminded of Truffaut by

GREGORY'S GIRL ◦ THE GOOD SOLDIER

the haunting transition that whisks us across town from Gregory's bedroom to Susan's, where she lies snuggled up in bed presumably dreaming of him. As for the Godardian epiphany when, stretched out on the grass, the couple persuade themselves that they can feel the earth's rotation, and Forsyth gently tilts the image to prove them right, it succeeds (as Godard's rarely did) in keeping their fleeting apprehension of cosmic immensity firmly rooted in a common, almost humdrum, human experience.

Still, *Gregory's Girl* is above all a comedy, and an even more eclectic one than *That Sinking Feeling*. Forsyth's dialogue now ranges from the suggestively Pinteresque ('What about Alan? D'ye think he's a virgin?' 'Och no, he's been in the school orchestra for over a year now') to the plain delirious (the amateur photographer's obsession with the word 'elephant' which, taking exactly one second to utter, is therefore useful for timing in a dark room); and at least one of his visual gags, surpassing even

Keaton and Tati, approaches purity (in the exposed centre of an empty playground, Gregory, late for class, heroically endeavours to conceal himself *behind nothing*). From a uniformly delightful cast no one should be singled out. But special mention really has to be made of Chic Murray, a well-known Scottish comedian who plays the headmaster and, with a film-stopping (as one says 'show-stopping') piano solo, offers us a couple of minutes—or one hundred and twenty elephants—of sheer bliss. □

Constancy, that's the virtue!

The Good Soldier/James Ivory

Ford Madox Ford's narrator John Dowell called *The Good Soldier* the saddest story he had ever heard, and so it is, but it doesn't pull you down in Kevin Billington's admirable adaptation for television, it exhilarates you as horror stories of shameless self-indulgence and virtue betrayed often can. Ford's 'Tale of Passion', as he subtitled what he regarded as his best work, has been criticised by readers today for being all a bit 'too much' towards its end, but what may seem to be too much in a book may be just the right amount, and necessary, in a piece of entertainment for television or the cinema. The wonder is that it hasn't been dramatised before.

Perhaps it was thought a great drawback having to set a film within a turn-of-the-century German spa, where everyone—the principal characters and the strolling extras in the background—has to guard his or her poor heart, or that of the person they're in attendance on, and take the tiniest steps and never raise a voice. And if nobody's actually ill, health along with everything else is repressed under late Victorian conventions. Given this, and in the hands of a less good director, *The Good Soldier* (Granada) might have soon expired amidst its handsomely photographed summer foliage and crisp spa tablecloths. But then Maisie Maidan—how perfect she looked, how perfect she was—enters Edward Ashburnham's rooms and silently, secretly inhales his presence and their love from his personal possessions, catching up the viewer in a spell of tenderness and eroticism; moments after, Leonora Ashburnham sees poor Maisie coming out of her husband's room and gives the girl a terrible whop, which is witnessed by their new friend, the insinuating Florence Dowell. From then on, the play is off and never lets you down.

That terrible way of being, which the Dowells so admired—the English upper class, little-muscle-throbbing-in-the-jaw manner, with all its self-importance and craziness over the appearances of things, is seen spinning out of control and crashing in a satisfying way, until the stage is littered with corpses and the survivors are left to piece together the story for themselves and for us via the very cunning script of Julian Mitchell. I was

surprised the London papers didn't make more of all this. Are such intelligent and lively adaptations so common, that they can go by with so little celebration?

The acting was fine and everyone looked right. One of the problems of doing period adaptations is that the actresses who play the big parts diet in a way that was never dreamed of in Victorian and Edwardian times. In those days, as in more remote centuries, if you were rich you were not only overdressed, you had to look a bit overfed, so that nobody mistook you for a member of the lower classes. But somewhere along in the 30s probably, all that changed, or was reversed. This means it's now almost impossible to cast an imposing looking woman, someone statuesque, someone like Susan Fleetwood, who played Leo-

nora Ashburnham, because everybody in the profession seems to exist on yoghurt, including the casting directors, who send up thin girls like themselves.

So it was not only a pleasure to see Miss Fleetwood in action, she was also a pleasure to look at striding about in her splendid low-cut dresses. She was the only one who got to run and to shout, and she was impressive. She had the best role, or she made it the best. She and Jeremy Brett were like a god and a goddess painted by Sargent. The two Americans seemed like dwarfs in comparison, and that was right too somehow, though it goes against the stereotype. Jeremy Brett's cracked-mask playing of Captain Ashburnham, in his dressed-for-dinner aspect, merely served to make more plausible the side of the character we scarcely glimpse and which is left by Billington to the imagination: the male animal side with its shaming lusts. He's completely pathetic when he croaks out that he's 'dying for love' for his ward Nancy, as if that justifies all the horrors it will bring in its train. Robin Ellis' sulky boy's face watches unhappily at the edge of the action; he's the American kid who's not allowed to play the bigger boys' games, who asks at the end, 'Why can't people have what they want?'

If the critic of films or plays knows in advance that he's expected to write a review of something he's watching, then how on earth is it possible to 'enjoy' the piece? The critic is a member of the audience first—or so I've always felt—sitting in the first row, as it were, yet he cannot relax for a second and either like or loathe with all the uninhibited force of a straight member of the audience. A kind of veil descends, notebooks are brought out, things must be got down somehow in the dark, attention is taken away, perhaps at crucial moments, and soon it is the critic's performance that takes over. Not out of vanity, but simply from a sense of professional duty. Poor critic! Poor director, poor actor! What an unhappy arrangement. How lucky everybody is when, through skill and experience and sheer energy and enthusiasm, that arrangement is transcended. Much as I liked *The Good Soldier*, I know I could have liked it so much more if I hadn't been scribbling things like this: Passion under Victorian ... Repressed emotions under ... Hairbrush scene ... Pillow ... And its aftermath ... Core of the sorrow in the world ... Constancy, that's the virtue! □



The Ashburnhams.

FILM REVIEWS

'We're just two punks, Frank'

The Postman Always Rings Twice/John Pym

Frank Chambers, the drifter-narrator of James Cain's novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934), refers several times to his 'rambling feet'. The phrase—and its repetition marks Cain's emphatic bluntness—recalls that romantic figure from our recent past, the rambling hobo. It has about it a ring of distant innocence. The locale is Southern California, the time the Depression. The novel's world, however, is bound in; and the novelist's interests, for example in such things as insurance double-dealing, seem somehow curiously abstract. Frank becomes the hired man of Nick Papadakis, Old January, the owner of the Twin Oaks Tavern, an isolated gas-station diner. Nick's young wife, Cora, an Iowan beauty queen marooned in California before the mistaken compromise of her marriage, has a sexual appetite sharpened by boredom and unfocused longing. A murder is cobbled together.

Cain's Frank Chambers, whose ironic, pulp history has attracted film-makers as different as Visconti and Tay Garnett, is trapped by ancient misfortune, but a misfortune compounded by pathetic personal incompetence. Once a supposedly accomplished hustler, he loses to a fellow-loser not only \$250 but also his \$3 wristwatch. The Frank Chambers created by the screenwriter David Mamet (better known up to now for his plays) and the director Bob Rafelson—and in particular by the sly, slicked-down Jack Nicholson—in the latest film version of the novel (CIC) is, however, a contrary figure.

What has now become the period shading of Cain's novel, which advances chiefly through its dialogue, is most evident in the unspoken assumptions of its characters. In Rafelson's film, an immaculate, unostentatious reconstruction, the period registers visually: a weatherbeaten pack of Camels; the thick off-white cups and plates of the diner. (The only unharmonious scene shows Frank and Cora hurrying past lines of the symbolically unemployed.) Within Rafelson's bounded, palpable world—California stretches away with placid indifference around the Twin Oaks—the illicit lovers seem knowing, if incompetent and ignorant, in an unmistakably modern way.

Nicholson's Frank Chambers is a mixture, a calculating cynic, a spinelessly violent man. John Garfield, who took the role in Garnett's 1946 version, is like the narrator of the novel simply—inexplicably—in thrall to Lana Turner's vampish Cora. In the new film, the hustling scene, which was originally told by a man against himself, has been adapted. About to flee with Cora, Frank shoots dice in an alley at the back of a bus depot; sensing a killing, he demands money to cover the bet; Cora, however, refuses to part with her savings, whereupon he angrily cashes in their tickets to freedom. He wins, then



Cora (Jessica Lange).

sneeringly outfaces the beaten sailor who reaches for a knife.

Rafelson opens out Frank and Cora's story with the elegance of his craftsmanship, the cut on the telling gesture (Frank's hesitant hand on the door of the car that at the beginning might have taken him away from the Twin Oaks), but in particular, perhaps, by the cunning use of ellipses and an eye for exact comparisons. At the end of the scene in the depot, Frank is discovered alone except for a somnolent, unknowing Negro cleaner; a fade takes us back to the gas station with Frank in stained overalls ('Phil' the embroidered nametag announces) standing in the rain, as lost as the Negro. Violence and cowardice are so much a part of him that how, or why, he got back to the Twin Oaks is wholly beside the point; the juxtaposition of the outfaced sailor, and Frank staring mournfully from beneath a sodden fedora, speaks another language.

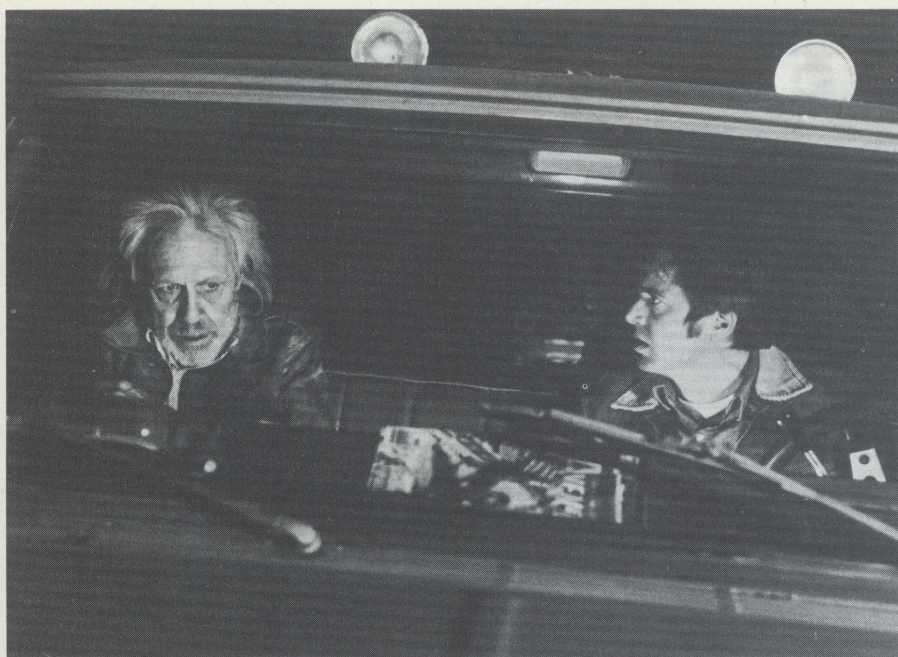
Rafelson's *Postman* is part serious homage to the *film noir* (and serious in a way which has nothing to do with the reverential motives behind the remake of a film such as *King Kong* in which, incidentally, Jessica Lange, who here plays Cora, made her début). It opens

with a black screen, plain credits and the sort of faultless, confident violin music asserting, rather than announcing, a foreboding tone. Lights appear, barely discernible spots; dawn seems to break, a cigarette glimmers; the drifter and his cigarette crosses from one side, car headlights from the other. The scrupulous look of the film, Sven Nykvist director of photography, veneers, however, what is still essentially a story without psychological depth: sex, the irresistible demon, exercises an overwhelming, transporting power...

Cain ended *The Postman* with Frank in the death cell speculating on the after-life: following the death of Nick (John Colicos) in a phoney car accident, Frank marries Cora only to have her die in a real accident and to find himself convicted of her murder. Mamet and Rafelson end with a haunting shot: Frank—the punishment inside his head—slumped brokenly over Cora's body. The difference between the original and the adaptation is that by the end of the latter we have just begun to care for the guiltless murderers. 'We're just two punks, Frank,' Cora says in the novel. And in truth they are. They talk with a sort of diverting, unfeeling acerbity which never really moves us: they are awkwardly abrupt lovers. When Frank sobs over Cora's body, one is moved to pity. His world has disintegrated just as self-awareness seemed about to dawn.

The Postman Always Rings Twice is not, perhaps, Rafelson at his very best. The material does constrain: the excursions into outlandish corners of the world are limited by the book (although by cutting Frank's trial, Rafelson deprives himself of the chance of bringing a bad-tempered wild cat into a courtroom), and excursions into the interior realities of his characters are limited by the fact that a sort of diffuse worry is the closest any of them come to self-analysis. Nevertheless, the Rafelson curlicues the film does have are both apposite and charming: the arrival at the Twin Oaks of a pack of Cub Scouts and their plump Leader, while Cora is away burying her mother, sends Frank into a frenzy; Cora arrives back and smiles with genuine amusement at his 'masculine' incapacity to make egg-salad sandwiches or slice pie.

There is too, between the ellipses and juxtapositions, that Rafelson hallmark, the sense of opportunities not so much lost as never grasped. Frank at one point leaves in a desultory attempt to find an illusory freedom in the embrace of a lion tamer (Anjelica Huston). He emerges at dawn in long shot from her splendidly decorated circus caravan, and then in the next shot looks down from above at his own mundane home where he must serve the customers and paint the white kerb rocks. The lion tamer had no use, she told her ringmaster, for tame cats, she wanted performers. Frank was never a performer: as a brief respite from his dismal fate, the best he could hope for was to put on a mock-Egyptian headdress and compliantly oil the lion tamer's sinewy back. □



In the pickup: Howard (Jason Robards) and Melvin (Paul le Mat).

Dreams that money can't buy

Melvin and Howard/Tim Palleine

If any American film-maker can be said nowadays to conform to the once prevalent model of distinctive craftsmanship operating within the broad confines of assorted medium-budget material (comparable with, for random example, Robert Wise in an earlier generation), it might well be Jonathan Demme. Proceeding from exploitation (the dynamic, if erratic, *Crazy Mama*) to latter-day populist comedy (*Citizens Band*) and then to an immensely stylish if ultimately hollow exercise in 'movie brat' Hitchcockiana (*Last Embrace*), Demme has now made in *Melvin and Howard* (CIC) his relatively most prestigious movie, yet at the same time the one most obviously anchored to its own historical moment.

This is partly, of course, because *Melvin and Howard* deals with actual events of the 70s: its principals are Howard Hughes and the impecunious working man Melvin Dummar by whom, according to Melvin, Hughes was given a lift after cracking up his motorcycle in the Nevada Desert, and to whom—again by his own version, for the courts subsequently disallowed the claim—Hughes willed a share of his fortune.

Demme's film begins with the curious nocturnal vignette of the purported desert meeting, with the decrepit Hughes slumped in the corner of Melvin's pickup truck, being badgered out of a pardonable reluctance to join in singing a grotesque Yuletide pop song composed by his rescuer, then hesitantly offering a solo rendition of what he claims to be the only song he knows, 'Bye, Bye, Blackbird'. But Hughes, a husklike Jason Robards, then disappears from the narrative, which is devoted to the peripatetically jumbled marital affairs of Melvin (Paul le Mat, star of *Citizens*

Band) and the wife, Lynda (Mary Steenburgen), who first leaves him, is then cajoled into remarriage after Melvin divorces her, and finally walks out again.

And it is here that *Melvin and Howard* is recognisably—even, at a slight remove in time, archetypally—a film of the 70s in form as well as content. It may not strictly be a road movie, though the credit sequence, with its seemingly endless ribbon of highway unspooling in front of Melvin's headlights, certainly hints at the genre. But with its constant shifts of locale, hopping from Nevada to California and back and on to Utah, and with the successive peregrinations of its central characters, even if these more often take place off-screen, it frequently feels a lot like one. And it remains open-ended, an effect heightened by the use of a device prevalent in many comparable 70s movies—*The Sugarland Express*, for instance—whereby captions form a post-script to the action, undercutting a conventional resolution and underlining the implications of an historical present.

For the film's grip is exerted primarily by a sense of casual verisimilitude, and in keeping with this Tak Fujimoto's camerawork, though frequently mobile, has the ostensibly free-form directness of a television reportage. What it conjures up is a hire-purchase, shift-work world of 'affluent' squalor, of watching daytime TV in a crowded trailer while outside the 'repo' men arrive to take back the car. It is a world, too, which tends to foster hard-nosed pragmatism: Bonnie, with whom Melvin ultimately settles down, after a fashion, to run a gas station, propositions him with the declaration that she has her kids' support grant money 'all saved up'.

Affectionately good-humoured as much of the observation is—especially that of

the mutual devotion between Melvin and his young daughter—the film's eye is, if never savage, then sometimes at least moderately scathing. This is most evident in the sequence of Melvin's remarriage to the now heavily pregnant Lynda, which with its trickily fast editing is the nearest the movie comes to a stylised set piece: having opted for Hawaiian drums to accompany the ceremony, the newly-weds are able, after an elderly hired witness has to retire in a state of collapse, to recoup the cost of the proceedings by themselves taking his place for a succession of other couples.

Later, when they are in the money, thanks to Lynda's winning \$10,000 on a TV show, disequilibrium persists as Melvin precipitates his spouse's second departure by insisting on making down-payments on a giant Cadillac and matching yacht. The film creates an image of momentarily chilling absurdity as Melvin—watching a taxi bear his wife and children away—stands beside this vessel, forlornly beached in his backyard, while its radio blurts out static-laden answers to his earlier, gleefully proprietorial queries to the coastguard, as if in hollow mockery of his aspirations to the idle class. (British TV viewers may be reminded here of the life and bad times of 'Spend, Spend, Spend' pools winner Vivian Nicholson.)

Despite these darker intimations, and the fact that in Bo Goldman's screenplay the pattern of repetitions at the level of both incident and detail locks the proceedings into more of a closed system than their quickfire surface might suggest, *Melvin and Howard* retains an essential buoyancy and enthusiasm. It is perhaps relevant that, in a Truffautesque 'privileged moment', the real Melvin Dummar's tiny guest appearance is as a snack-bar attendant conspicuous for his affability.

Melvin and Lynda may be shown as snagged in a largely fruitless quest for the dreams that money can buy, but the movie manages modestly to realise for them one or two of the dreams that it can't, in the genial epiphanies of their respective performances to cheering crowds, Lynda's tap dance on the TV show and Melvin's rockabilly turn at the works Christmas dance, episodes recorded with a quite unpatronising air of involvement.

Moreover, the ending endorses this vein of optimism by setting a seal on Melvin's staunch insistence that, whatever the upshot of litigation, what really matters is that, once upon a time, 'Howard Hughes sang my song'. The concluding sequence offers the jauntily down to earth, and literally upbeat, fantasy of Hughes, the hobo millionaire, taking over the wheel of Melvin's truck as the couple combine in a hearty duet of 'Bye, Bye, Blackbird' while they drive away into the darkness. It is not just the warmth but also the shrewdly anti-climactic quality of this ending which testifies to that unpretentious certitude in Demme's handling and marks him as a director well worth watching. □

FILM REVIEWS

The theatre of Occupied Paris

The Last Metro/Julian Jebb



Catherine Deneuve (centre) in 'The Last Metro'.

It is not surprising that *The Last Metro* (Gala) has proved François Truffaut's most popular film to date both in France and the United States. It boasts two of France's most popular stars, Catherine Deneuve and Gérard Depardieu, the latter proving decisively with his performance in this film, after *Loulou* and *This Sweet Sickness* that he is the best leading player on the screen today. It has a host of comic or tragi-comic characters all acted with perfection. Above all it is the most purely thrilling film that Truffaut has yet directed and co-authored, the most tightly plotted and ingeniously made.

Set in the world of theatrical Paris of 1942, it tells the story of how Marion Steiner (Deneuve) is left to carry on as sole manageress and leading lady of the Théâtre Montmartre, when her husband has had to flee the country because he is a Jew. Bernard (Depardieu) is a young actor from the Grand Guignol who joins the company as leading man in a racially impeccable play, written by a Norwegian and set at the turn of the century. It is called *Disappearance*. It would be wrong to reveal some of the surprises, but one can say that Lucas Steiner, Marion's husband, the 'genius' who used to run the theatre, is in fact hiding in its cellar and that Bernard is working for the Resistance.

Although I do not think it is Truffaut's greatest film it is, with *Day for Night* and *Jules et Jim*, his two other big hits, among his most enjoyable. Its 132 minutes flash by. Part of the ingenuity of its visual construction is rooted in the idea that the scenes off-stage, outside the theatre, have a greater theatricality than those inside the building. The little square where the theatre is situated is

very clearly a set; the curtains that swish closed in the local café look exactly like tabs on a stage; the biggest melodramatic scene takes place in a Nazified night club. Just as the metaphors about film-making were so subtly woven into the texture of *Day for Night*, so in *The Last Metro* all the world is a stage.

As the story progresses and the first night of *Disappearance* approaches, we are given an increasing number of scenes from what looks and sounds, I'm afraid, a pretty bad play. The word 'lie' recurs frequently, and gradually the subtext and thus the full meaning of the film is revealed: it is about the difference between mendacity and artifice both in politics and in love. Everyone is role-playing. Most people honourably and one, the collaborator critic Daxiat (Jean-Louis Richard), despicably. Daxiat is the most unexpected character I remember in any of Truffaut's films—he is purely evil and is given no saving grace by a director who has never before allowed such moral disapproval to stain any of his creations. The actor who plays this monster of duplicity and cowardice is an unknown, and he does it very well: we are chilled by his pudgy sycophancy and outrageous hypocrisy.

More of a problem is Steiner himself, played by the handsome Heinz Bennent. It is notoriously difficult to portray a genius, and he has a good stab at the immured man tortured by frustration. But he is a parody Bohemian; with his long scarf and floppy hat he could have walked out of a Lautrec poster. One wishes that Truffaut, himself a genius and an interesting actor, had played the part, bringing to it his peculiar on-screen detachment which we have seen in *Day for Night*, *L'Enfant sauvage* and *Close*

Encounters. His acting is fascinating in contrast to his moral style as a director: one is dry, severe, almost absent in its unsentimental search for the romantic truth; the other, the director's, is in a perpetual ecstasy at the sweet oddnesses of life and its disappointments.

The Last Metro is so crammed with references, gestures and nods to other films that it would be tiresome to enumerate them. Truffaut cares about art in the way that most people care about themselves or those they are in love with. He celebrates good nature, stupidity, courage and—it must be said *again*—the capacity for attentive tenderness of which human beings are capable. This love of life and art spins and spans out; he almost threatens the audience with his delight at being part of the privilege of being alive.

No film-maker has used literature with such passionate, open-hearted fastidiousness. In the very first scene where Bernard attempts to pick up a girl on the street we are both warned and delighted by what is to come. The surprises mount as the echoes of Balzac and Stendhal mingle with those of René Clair and Jean Renoir. The film is saturated with a Hitchcockian tension, but unmarked by the late director's sly misanthropy. Shot largely in close-up, with much use of panning and tracking shots, the style of the film further underlines the claustrophobia both of the war and the little tantrum-filled world of the theatre—again in complete contrast to *Day for Night*, with its swooning, looping crane-shots looking in wonder at the chaos of a film set.

Deneuve has always been at her best directed by Truffaut. Where Buñuel, both in *Belle de Jour* and *Tristana*, offered us an exquisite blank on which we might scribble our fantasies, Truffaut, in *La Sirène du Mississippi*, brought out a beautiful mysterious human being. In *The Last Metro* she has never been more glamorous: she can be tough, outraged, cold, loyal, stricken with doubt and desire, and achieves all these with conviction. As for Depardieu, his sexuality has little to do with his bruised body and broken nose, it lies rather in a hesitant, sometimes comic yearning combined with a determined and innocent courage. The irony of his chase after the theatre's wardrobe mistress involves one ravishingly funny moment when in his desperation he says he will tell her fortune by reading her palm—an excuse to touch her physically which she declines for deeper reasons than he then knows.

Hands play an important, understated, symbolic part in the film. The handshake, after all, is an image of trust as much as of greeting, and in the frightened, deceitful world of the Occupation there are special ironies in its abuse. There is a terrifying shot when Marion has to go to the Gestapo to plead that her theatre should not be shut down and she is shown into a room by a flattering Nazi officer and we realise, as the camera stares at his grip on her hand which he will not let go, that he wants to seduce,

even rape her. Finally, in the very last shot, Marion stands centre stage and the camera pans from her holding her lover's hand in one and her husband's in the other: the triangle has, as it were, become a straight line. We are given a wonderfully Truffautesque image that no love or passion is wasted.

As ever in the abundant and electrifying world which Truffaut creates in his larger films it is tempting to describe the countless happy touches. One must suffice. There is a gentle running gag involving a little boy watering some plants in the tiny square of the theatre. Someone asks him how his flowers are faring. 'They're not flowers,' he snaps back, undistracted from his job. 'Ah, so you're a patriot—planting vegetables.' 'No,' says the boy, his concentration undeterred, 'you don't eat it—you smoke it.' □

Façades

Quartet/Tom Milne

As their record together suggests, James Ivory is never averse to exercising the uncanny gift for period evocation that makes for the best of films like *The Wild Party*, *Roseland* and *The Europeans*, while Ruth Jhabvala seems more at home with original scripts like *Autobiography of a Princess*, *Hullabaloo over Georgie and Bonnie's Pictures* and *Jane Austen in Manhattan* than with literary adaptations. Put these two factors together, and you have one of the reasons why something seems to have gone awry with the tone and temper of *Quartet* (Fox).

Instantly conjured by the montage of hotel façades that graces the credit titles, the Paris of the 20s remains at first a discreetly unassuming ghost haunting the hotel room, so precisely redolent of a slightly *louche* poverty, in which Marya Zelli (Isabelle Adjani), an innocently helpless expatriate from the West Indies, clings precariously to a happiness threatened by the fact that her husband Stephan (Anthony Higgins) is not only a conman but a Polish refugee in a milieu feverishly imagining a nightmare of Bolshevik plots.

But as he lands in jail and she graduates to cosmopolitan society under the wolfish protection of the artistic English couple, H. J. Heidler (Alan Bates) and his tormentedly complaisant wife Lois (Maggie Smith), that ghost suddenly materialises into a full-fledged semblance of the heartless, roaring 20s. A scene like the mildly wild party in a night club, with the camera performing marvels through two uninterrupted numbers by a jazz singer to pick up echoes of jealous bitching, desire unleashed, protective impulse and laconic debauchery, is by way of being a brilliant *morceau d'anthologie*; but it is also, in terms of the Jean Rhys novel on which the film is based, as out of place as if Bresson's country priest had found his diary being filmed in widescreen, Technicolor and stereophonic sound.

The reference to Bresson is not entirely gratuitous, since the novel, though less bleak than its sequels in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* and *Good Morning, Midnight*, has a monotone quality that not only keeps any sense of gay Paree and carefree flappers very much in the background, but is absolutely in keeping with the aimlessly drifting character of the heroine: '... reckless, lazy, a vagabond by nature.' It is clear that Jean Rhys, who pursued this heroine (under different names) along her downward slope to hopelessness through a sequence of four rather more than semi-autobiographical novels (two of which hinge on her unhappy affair with Ford Madox Ford), did not like herself very much. Nor did she make the character, whining, self-pitying and feckless, particularly attractive; Marya is not pitiable so much as tragic, gradually beaten down by circumstances with which she is simply not equipped to cope.

Isabelle Adjani, however, plays her as the conventional pathetic victim. In this she is abetted by the adaptation, which presents her relationship with Stephan as one of contented marital bliss, her encounter with Heidler as a tumble into passion, and the outcome therefore an impasse between two loves. Jean Rhys is altogether more sceptical, starting with her laconic preamble to Marya's marriage. 'At twenty-four she imagined with dread that she was growing old. Then, during a period of unemployment spent in London, she met Monsieur Stephan Zelli.' Though telling herself that Stephan is 'probably a bad lot', she nevertheless accepts him *faute de mieux*, and while imminently expecting the worst, is lulled into a sense of loving by his presence, his amiable cossetting, and his failure to walk out. We are thus guided, when she pleads her love for Heidler, to remember not only that he is

wealthy, but that he represents *present* security in Stephan's absence.

In support of its shift in viewpoint, the film has to work a good deal of distortion on the novel's structure, which is told in the third person but achieves the effect of subjective narrative (Bresson again) by having everything radiate from the heroine as a central focus. We therefore know, effectively, only what she knows or is told. The film opens up in all sorts of ways, notably in 'inventions' relating to Heidler's wife Lois, whom we see burning a dress which might remind him of the unhappy end in suicide of one of his previous mistresses, or suddenly throwing herself at his feet in an agony of spurned love.

Such sidelights really do nothing but lend an irrelevant turn of the screw to the already ample pathos. They do not enrich or clarify the character of Lois, a subject for baffled speculation by Marya in the novel, which is in fact explained in Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* (the same sad story, though actually predating the Ford-Rhys affair, told with 'Heidler' as the central focus) through the Roman Catholicism which prevents the wife from contemplating divorce. The result is that instead of presenting the novel's *huis clos* of three people equally balanced in mutual destruction—Heidler haplessly driven by his perennial rediscovery of the love of his life, Lois giving him his head in the hope of getting him back when the novelty wears off, Marya obsessively pursuing her need for the strong arm of security—the film finds itself weaving uneasily into a limbo where comedy of manners threatens to develop into jejune social criticism.

For instance, possibly because the characters now fail either to hang together or to make sense individually, more probably in order to play up to the foregrounding of the period atmosphere, certain lines of dialogue from the novel are amplified out of all context. Too much play, in particular, is made of Heidler's protest that Marya isn't 'playing the game' when she rebels against the hole-and-corner aspect of their affair, or Lois' anxious hope that 'you are not going to talk to anybody in Paris about all this, are you?' when she finally walks out. It is not just that 'keeping up appearances' is as secondary in importance to the tragedy as the fact that the period happens to be the 20s. The problem here is that—as through much of the film, and unusually in Ivory's work—the actors give such lines the sort of emphasis that suggests, not that *they* believe them, but that they know the amusement with which audiences will respond to the old playing fields of Eton bit.

In a way all this is unfair to *Quartet*, which is bright, brilliant and often immensely entertaining. But it lacks the perfect mosaic quality, the sense of characters interweaving through intricate arabesques that reveal much more than they ever articulate or even suspect about themselves, which one has come to expect of Merchant-Ivory-Jhabvala. And it certainly isn't Jean Rhys. □



Marya (Isabelle Adjani).

Acceptable criticism?

FRITZ LANG: THE IMAGE AND THE LOOK

edited by Stephen Jenkins

BFI/£6.95 and £3.95

STERNBERG

edited by Peter Baxter

BFI/£6.50 and £3.25

What links Sternberg and Lang? These two collections of essays bring out the fact that it is less their shared cultural origins or their comparable excursions through Hollywood than the critical investment which each director has attracted and the exemplary nature of each *oeuvre*. What is at issue, as Stephen Jenkins rightly stresses, is not simply the interpretation to be placed on each body of films—the need to challenge the received opinion that Fate is the common theme running through all Lang's work, or that Sternberg's major achievement was that he created Marlene Dietrich. It is, much more broadly, the kind of criticism a knowledgeable and interested public would wish to entertain. For reasons which neither editor examines, Lang and Sternberg have provided a convenient focus for critical approaches—the sociological, the formalist, the *auteurist*—which have struck a particularly responsive chord in Britain. This *Lang* and this *Sternberg*, therefore, do not so much invite a meditation on 'the German cinema' or the 'Viennese school', as on the quality of film criticism in this country.

First, *Sternberg*, for it is an altogether slighter book than Jenkins' *Lang* and, by comparison, lightweight. Peter Baxter prefaces his selection of critical essays with an introduction so wide-ranging that it fails to focus on the subject in anything but the most distant way. The reader is hard put to tell where Baxter stands critically or what his book is trying to do, viz: 'The point of this collection is to make available a number of texts in which a figure, "Joseph von Sternberg", has been inscribed, written into a sort of conceptual being, inscribed in human three-dimensionality and complexity from within the cultural apparatus and activity of an ideological plural but hierarchic society' (p. 8). As a statement of intent this is hardly pellucid.

However, once this hurdle is passed—or skipped—the rag-bag (for until otherwise advised one has to assume the miscellany unmotivated) turns out to have both a certain logic and a certain value. The logic is chronological.

Possibly Baxter finds the diachronic embarrassing because it is old hat. More's the pity, because it is both useful and interesting to have to hand newspaper reviews of the 1930s and 1950s culled from a number of countries, with the foreign contributions in some cases being rather well translated by the editor himself. But again, one senses Baxter's rejection of anything so reactionary as bibliography, even though the reader would have been better served by fuller information—place of publication, language of origin, etc—and by some sense of the stock from which this particular selection was drawn. Baxter reprints some classics: Kracauer on *The Blue Angel*, Arnheim on Sternberg. But these are rendered much more significant by Jenkins' discussion, in *Fritz Lang*, of the problems raised by sociological criticism than by anything Baxter can muster. Why did he not *contextualise*—to use a cant expression? However, and this is perhaps the lesson of the book, the two essays which shine are French in origin: *Cahiers du Cinéma*'s collective text on *Morocco* and, best of all, Luc Moullet's *Saint Janet*.

Unlike Baxter, Jenkins knows what he wants to do, says so, and does it. True he had more opportunity, as the centrepiece of the book is his own long essay, 'Lang: Fear and Desire'. But the rest of the book is also extremely informative if not, perhaps, totally satisfactory. Both in his introduction and in a chapter on 'Lang and Auteursim', Jenkins reviews the critical orthodoxies which have, historically, accreted around Lang's work. These, essentially, have been the 'expressionist' (the Lotte Eisner version), Lang as sick society's privileged witness (the Kracauer version) and Lang the *auteur* (the *Cahiers* version). Not simply, therefore, has Lang's *oeuvre* 'followed a path which is none other than the one taken by the cinema itself', but Lang criticism has tended to have the same locomotive force. Jenkins then reprints articles by Philippe Demonsablon and Michel Mourlet (both from *Cahiers* 1959), which have lost much of their freshness, and Raymond Bellour's classic piece written in 1966. The final essay is Jean-Louis Comolli and François Géré's discussion of *Hangmen Also Die*, somewhat unhappily divorced from the companion piece on *To Be or Not To Be* and, indeed, *Cahiers du Cinéma*'s general discussion of fascism.

It will be gathered that Stephen Jenkins finds *Cahiers du Cinéma* a more stimulating and pertinent source of material than any film review in this country. But this *parti pris*, though it offers the chance for some good knockabout stuff at the expense of Gavin Lambert, Andrew Sarris and other luminaries of an earlier generation, does not explain why

there is no British *Cahiers*. And in a book this size Jenkins cannot answer this question, though flashes of exasperation in his text give the sense that he would dearly love to.

His own essay, though, is stimulating and convincing. He offers a way to see a unity in Lang's *oeuvre* without having recourse either to 'Fate/Destiny', or to the aptly named 'architectural factor' which is 'important ... in the *auteurist* attempt to seal the gap between the German and American periods' (p. 52), or to a rejection of the American period as somehow unworthy of Lang. Jenkins' proposal is to look at 'the question of the significance of the female in the Lang text', the way the female presence 'troubles' the text and the displacements it produces. And though this reading is no less partial than any of the earlier ones which it renders inadequate, it has the advantage of working. Jenkins claims that the selection of films discussed was arbitrary and subject to availability, which is the guarantee of experimental rectitude. Nevertheless, it is his discussion of extremely well-known films such as *Metropolis* (p. 82 sqq) which will ultimately persuade: he avoids the 'critical commonplace' that the film's ending is 'reactionary ... humanist', and the assertion that Lang was clairvoyant about Nazism, and instead suggests that Freder '... at the end of his Oedipal trajectory resumes his role as a function of the patriarchal, oppressive order' (p. 87). The conclusions of a closely argued analysis naturally suffer from being stated thus baldly and, moreover, do little justice to Jenkins who does his subject the honour of 'close reading'. It is to be hoped that readers will pay Jenkins the same compliment, for the freshness and seriousness of his approach offer a way forward from the malaise which both these collections demonstrate exists in British film criticism—its Oedipal trajectory, no doubt.

JILL FORBES

'A blue chimera'

THIS LOVING DARKNESS

by C. B. Morris

Oxford University Press/£12.95

An explanatory sub-heading to the enigmatically titled *This Loving Darkness* (for nowhere to my knowledge is the precise reference to the quote, if such it is, elucidated in the text) reads: The Cinema and Spanish Writers 1920–1936. Now a critic will sometimes deem it necessary to preface a review with a 'declaration of interest'. In a similar spirit, I feel

duty bound to declare my 'lack of interest'. Before opening this slim and elegantly produced volume, I had never pondered the influence of Ben Turpin on the poetry of Rafael Alberti nor had occasion to mull over Manuel Altolaguirre's gruff dictum, formulated as late as 1962: 'He who wishes to be no longer who he is, he who wishes to obtain a soul on loan, let him take refuge in the cinema.' Though tolerably conversant with Lorca (in translation only), I have read no Valle-Inclán, no Aleixandre, nor either of the Machados. So, before I wholly disqualify myself in the reader's eyes (not to mention Professor Morris'), let me immediately announce that from such a perspective the book turned out to be both informative and charming.

More informative, to be sure, on Spanish writers than on the cinema. Not only is its field of study restricted to an excessively narrow range of films (mostly Buñuel, the French avant-garde and American burlesque) but it contains errors that, inoffensive as they are, might have been avoided with a little extra editorial care. Errors of fact, as when Morris twice credits Lumière with Méliès' *Le Voyage dans la lune*; of judgment, as when, chiding the poet Cernuda for his 'lowbrow taste', he cites as examples *The Big Parade*, *The Merry Widow* (Stroheim) and *The Thief of Baghdad* (Walsh); and of a third, less easily definable category, exemplified by this baffling digest of Hollywood mythopoeia: 'The renaming of Theodosia Goodman as Theda Bara—an anagram of Arab Death—was meant to transport her to a plane of fantasy which Dean Martin was to occupy some fifty years later when he married for the third time.' But it is, oddly enough, by virtue of these very blemishes that *This Loving Darkness* acquires its peculiar, almost nostalgic charm. In the asceticism of its position vis-à-vis popular culture and tendency to downgrade any comic bereft of 'poetic' or 'surrealist' resonance, it becomes endearingly reminiscent of the first books ever written on the movies.

As in that early literature, naively enshrining what Cocteau had already termed 'Cinéma, nouvelle Muse', Morris never encases his subject matter in any theoretical grid. Where he excels is in close readings and felicitous quotations; for though, as definitions of the new art form, Giménez Caballero's 'a vampire preying on eyes', Angel Marsa's 'a blue chimera' and Ramon Gomez de la Serna's 'the world's mouth full of light and daring', may not constitute the acme in scientific rigour, they are all whimsically evocative phrases of a type that 'they don't make any more' and convey more vividly than any statistics the pioneering *cinéphilie* of the Spanish intelligentsia.

In his first chapter, 'The Dream

House', he sets the scene, detailing the weird fad for inventories that overtook Madrid's newspapers ('it would require 6,742 thumbnails to cover the area of the standard size screen'), the absurdly learned essays ('Estética y ritmo de Johnny Weismuller') and, more significantly, the founding in 1928 of the Cineclub Espanol. Thereupon, he proceeds to examine what effect this moviemania had on contemporary Spanish novelists, dramatists and particularly on the poets Alberti, Cernuda and Lorca.

For during at least part of their respective careers, all three of these poets were nurtured by film. Lorca, in fact, wrote two screenplays: the interminable *Viaje a la luna*, revealing the influence of *Le Sang d'un poète* ('Letters saying HELP! HELP! and moving downwards with a double exposure of a woman's sexual parts') and Duchamp's *Nu descendant un escalier* ('The camera, with an accelerated pace, descends the stairs and, with a double expo-

sure, ascends them'), and *El paseo de Buster Keaton*, in which Buster was made a murderer. Neither was filmed. Regular attendance at his local flea-pit enabled Cernuda both to redefine and externalise his homosexual solitude in a cycle of poems devoted to Fairbanks, Valentino, John Gilbert and George O'Brien (particularly cherished in *Is Zat So?*). And the haughtily eclectic Alberti recruited a whole gallery of Hollywood icons, from Adolphe Menjou and other such 'bandoleiros de smoking' to the mysterious Charley Bowers 'comic inventor', as satirical props in *Yo era un tonto*, and reconverted to literature the 'plastic' metaphors of Clair, Dulac and Epstein in a more consciously modernist collection, *Cal y canto*.

To anyone without (or, of course, with) an *a priori* interest in the cinema and Spanish writers 1920-1936, I recommend this quirky and entertaining study.

GILBERT ADAIR

LETTERS

Triumph of the Will

SIR,—I would like to make some comments on Brian Winston's deliberately controversial reconsideration of *Triumph of the Will* (SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1981). First of all, I must say that I do not align myself with the critics who admire the film's great artistic power only in a notion of contradiction with its 'vicious ideology', for this is to separate form and content, a particularly artificial and useless division where film propaganda is concerned. It seems to me that it is possible to admire the persuasive presentation of an ideology without necessarily condoning that ideology; after all, those who praise *Battleship Potemkin* are not all sympathetic to communism, yet the film can be praised for the power with which it conveys communist ideology. Similarly, Riefenstahl—whatever she may be or may have been as a person—should be admired for her presentation of Nazi themes.

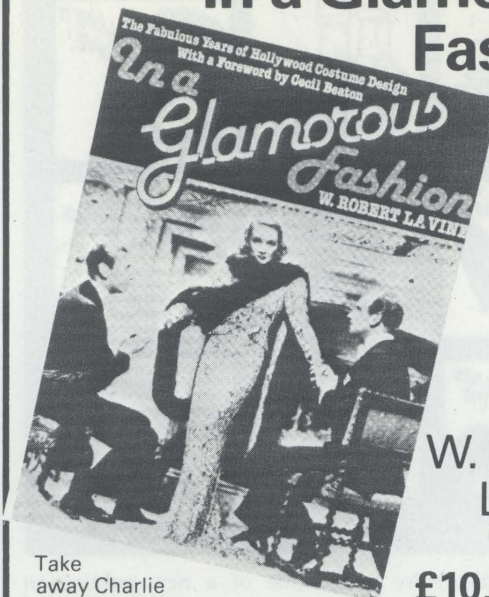
I do not think Mr Winston would disagree with the basis of my argument, but—through a number of emotive, and not always justified, criticisms in his article ('dull', 'crass and boring', etc)—he totally denies the film's effectiveness as propaganda. There is emphasis on the argument that any impressive qualities the film may have are 'not through the fact of filming'. In other words, Mr Winston denies the power of such properties of film as editing, camera angle and camera movement, all of which are precisely employed in the film to great effect. Perhaps he has not considered, for instance, how Hitler is made to seem literally at

one with the people ('Hitler is Germany, just as Germany is Hitler,' Hess announces at the end) by such cinematic devices as panning from him to the crowds (or vice versa) and complex, rapid intercutting of him with the shots of the crowd on either side of the street during the motorcade sequence. Low angle shots of Hitler emphasise his authority, but also link him to the sky (whence he came). By positioning the camera so that a light source is behind him, Hitler is given a halo at several points, implying a comparison with Christ (a theme throughout the film). One could cite many more examples of how Riefenstahl and her cameramen use specifically cinematic means to achieve propagandist effects.

Mr Winston criticises the film on technical grounds—for out-of-focus shots, continuity errors, etc—but if it has taken nearly fifty years, an Associate Professor of Film and (presumably) a still-frame projector for these imperfections to be noticed, then this is all the more tribute to Riefenstahl's ability to deceive. The power of film, including documentaries and especially propaganda pieces, lies not in a flat recording of reality, but in its illusiveness. *Triumph of the Will* provides an experience, a whole more than the sum of its parts, which can spellbind an audience to the extent where such imperfections are neither apparent nor important.

Ignoring for the moment the question of the film's artistic merits, one must consider whether it is 'vicious' and 'pornographic', as the article claims. As Mr Winston himself points out, such aspects of it as 'the spectacle of the dehumanised mass', and its militarism,

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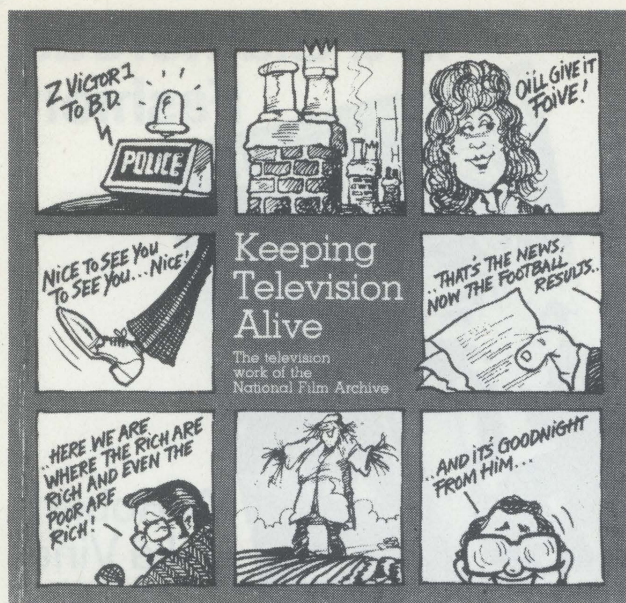
I am always interested in purchasing all out-of-print cinema books, etc.

are by no means peculiar to fascism. Apart from Streicher's reference to 'the highest value of racial purity', there is no explicit evidence of racism, surely fascism's most deplorable feature. It is only when we, with our gift of hindsight, put the film into the context of everything we know about Nazi Germany that it becomes 'vicious'; in itself, it is not. This is not to deny that the film is fascist propaganda; it presents its audiences with only the most attractive aspects of fascism. The underside was gradually made more prominent later—when people had already been converted—in truly pornographic films like *The Eternal Jew*.

I cannot, of course, dispute Mr Winston's personal reactions to

Triumph of the Will; I can only say that I have seen the film in its complete version several times, and have been totally engrossed and impressed by it. Perhaps this is an admission of some fascist tendencies within me, tendencies which I feel are probably within all of us to various degrees. However, I do think that the film's power ultimately resides in Riefenstahl's cinematic presentation of Nazi ideology—neither in its content, nor in its form, alone, but in a marriage of the two. *Triumph of the Will* provokes a set of responses more complex than most people are aware of or—perhaps—care to admit.

Yours faithfully,
JONATHAN SANDERS
University of Warwick.



Keeping Television Alive is the title of a new publication describing the television work of the National Film Archive. Edited by Paul Madden, who until recently was Television Officer of the National Film Archive, the book catalogues all programmes acquired before the end of March 1979. In the opening pages there are useful articles on the work of the archive including a description of the programme selection process, preservation, access, and television stills.

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LETTERS

Nicholas Ray

SIR,—Tom Farrell's article on Nicholas Ray (SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1981) implies that Ray did no film work between *55 Days at Peking* (1962) and returning to America in 1969 to film the *Chicago Conspiracy Trial*. This is not true. In 1965 he shot a test reel for his version of *The Doctor and the Devils*, which was to have starred Susannah York and Barbara Steele. In 1968 he came to London, where he began shooting a feature called *Wha-at*; this project was abandoned after six days.

Yours faithfully,
DAVID MCGILLIVRAY
London, N.W.6.

Dial M for Murder

SIR,—It is simply not true, as Richard Combs states in his article in SIGHT AND SOUND (Spring 1981), that Hitchcock's *Dial M for Murder* was 'never shown in 3D'. It was screened in the 3D format at the Davis Theatre, Croydon, when first released in Britain. I know this because I saw it there, and at that time it was advertised in the British and American trades as being available for rental in either the 3D version or the flat one.

Yours faithfully,
DAVE GODIN
Heeley, Sheffield.

Len Lye

SIR,—I am writing a biography of Len Lye, the pioneer of 'direct' film-making, who died last year in

New York. Len Lye worked for the GPO Film Unit during the 1930s, and directed documentaries for the Ministry of Information and other sponsors during the 1940s. He contributed articles to SIGHT AND SOUND in 1939 and 1940, and his work was often discussed in this magazine. After moving to the United States he worked for the March of Time, made experimental films, and designed kinetic sculpture. I am interested in all aspects of his career and would be very pleased to hear from anyone who knew him.

Yours faithfully,
ROGER HORROCKS
English Department,
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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

CHRIS AUTY has been Film Editor for *Time Out* ... FRANCIS CAIRNS is a freelance writer living in Paris who also makes films ... JOHN CHITTOCK is Film and Video Correspondent of the *Financial Times* and editorial chairman of *Screen Digest* ... JAMES IVORY's latest film is *Quartet* ... STEVE JENKINS is Associate Editor of the *Monthly Film Bulletin* and editor of the recently published monograph *Fritz Lang: The Image and the Look* ... TONY RAYNS is a writer and critic whose special interest is in the cinema of the Far East.

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ARTIFICIAL EYE for *Ai No Borei*, *Wise Blood*.
ARTIFICIAL EYE/FILMS DU LOSANGE for *La Femme de l'aviateur*.
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CANNES

Continued from page 163

who had seemingly disappeared—was actually killed by the police in the Gdansk riots of 1970. But the film goes back further than that: we see the first conflict between father and son on the occasion of the student uprising in 1968 when, as in France, the workers refused to follow the students. Then, two years later, unlike the French, the Polish workers themselves revolted, and this time asked the aid of the students.

So the film covers a period from 1968 to the present day; not an easy task, and not surprisingly—though it is the only fault one can find with the film—the flashbacks are occasionally confusing. Wajda has cleverly followed the same narrative technique in this film as in its predecessor, but with one crucial difference. In *Man of Marble*, the narrator, the detective if you like, was a committed film-maker: Agnieszka, played by Krystyna Janda. This time the character used to tell the story is an uncommitted radio interviewer, who is actually sent to Gdansk with orders to unmask the 'second line'—to prove that behind the strikers is a gang of counter-revolutionaries in the pay of the CIA and/or Radio Free Europe. He accepts the job, but as he begins to investigate the situation and to talk to the strike leaders, he gradually realises that there is no 'second line', no counter-revolutionary gang. Scared out of his skin, he tries to play both sides against each other and inevitably ends up the loser.

Man of Iron is not only unique in its instant and convincing synthesis of the current Polish situation. It is also the only successful example of that genre which goes under the awful name of docu-drama. For Wajda successfully mixes fiction with fact, acted scenes with newsreels; and if we see Lech Walesa in newsreel footage, he also turns up (briefly) as an actor, playing the best man at the wedding of Tomczyk, son of the man of marble, and Agnieszka, the television film-maker. So fiction and actuality are fused into an artistic whole. And there is the further pleasure—like that of the Trollope series of novels—of seeing some of the same characters again. Sometimes they are changed almost beyond recognition: Krystyna Janda, for example, whose hysteria marred *Man of Marble* for some people, has now become a calm, confident, charming woman.

Another element which was absent from Wajda's previous portraits of Polish life is very much to the fore here: the immense importance of the Catholic church, as witness the extraordinary scene where the massed strikers intone a Hail Mary, invoking the aid of the Virgin in their struggle. There seems to be no conflict in the minds of the Poles between Marxism (or Communism) and a steadfast belief in the Catholic faith. Even the character played by Krystyna Janda

admits that, although when young she went to church only to please her parents, she has nevertheless decided that she would like her wedding to be a religious one. And it is at that religious service, not the civil one, that Walesa makes his appearance. Amazing. A Grand Prix winner if ever I saw one.

● I suppose at this point I should mention another Polish film which turned up as this year's unannounced 'surprise' occasion: Skolimowski's *Hands Up!*, made in 1967 and immediately banned, a discussion piece featuring a group of drunken students. Unfortunately, we did not see the original *Hands Up!* but a bastardised version, since Skolimowski had the unhappy idea of adding a twenty-five minute prologue (filmed this spring in London and Beirut) which is not only embarrassingly inept and pretentious but which inevitably reduced one's interest in the version of *Hands Up!*, now running only fifty-five minutes, which followed it. The original film must of course have been considerably longer than this cut-down version, and one was left wondering what is now missing. What we did see was extraordinarily original in both its narrative and cinematographic technique, but it was hard to appreciate it after the disastrous start. Let us hope that Film Polski can be convinced they have made a mistake and should release the original complete—minus later additions.

● The only non-East European film during the second week that really impressed me was Bernardo Bertolucci's *Tragedy of a Ridiculous Man*. In many ways, it marks a decisive break with his work of the 70s. It is his first all-Italian film since *The Spider's Stratagem* in 1969 (even though Anouk Aimée plays a leading role, for once the actress has not been dubbed but speaks in Italian); and it is also the first of Bertolucci's films for more than ten years in which Vittorio Storaro has not been his lighting cameraman. Instead, Bertolucci has worked with Antonioni's veteran cameraman Carlo Di Palma, and the result is a tougher and harder looking film. Gone are the golden glints of Storaro's romantic vision; gone the smoke bombs. Di Palma's style of camerawork suits the subject matter of the film, which is also a break with all Bertolucci's work since *Before the Revolution* (1964): this is a film about contemporary Italy and, at least on the surface, about terrorism.

One thing, however, has not changed: as so often in Bertolucci's films, this one concerns a relationship between a father and son, even though the hero this time is the father and the son is glimpsed only at the beginning and again at the very end of the film. (The son is played by Ricardo Tognazzi, son of Ugo who plays

the father.) There is also another, more subtle difference in the way the film has been made, a difference which can best be described by a comparison with *Mon Oncle d'Amérique* and its relation to Resnais' earlier work. In each case, the director has tried to simplify his style: gone are the baroque camera movements, the lyrical effects, the luscious décors. Bertolucci, like Resnais, has opted for a more classical, stripped down, dryer style. As he puts it, this film is in prose. And inevitably, by refusing—laudably, no doubt—to repeat himself and to make the kind of film expected of him, he has disappointed some of his admirers.

The new film does have problems. To begin with, there is the title: I see no tragedy, nor do I see a man any more ridiculous than anyone else. Our hero, one Primo Spaggiari, is a self-made manufacturer of Parmesan cheese. He and his French wife (that's how Bertolucci gets round Anouk Aimée's slight accent in Italian) have seemingly led a very contented life until the day the film begins, which happens to be Spaggiari's birthday. He gets a present of a yachting cap and a pair of powerful binoculars from his twenty-year-old son. But, when he tries out the binoculars, the first thing he sees through them is the kidnapping of the son. Soon afterwards the ransom demand arrives: one million pounds. To raise this money, Spaggiari would have to sell everything he owns.

It is not, however, a straightforward kidnapping. We learn from the son's girlfriend that the boy had often talked about kidnapping his father, so that we begin to wonder if this incident is in fact quite what it seems. Bertolucci never makes it entirely clear, to the annoyance of some sections of the audience. His defence is that to have explained the situation clearly would be a betrayal of contemporary Italian reality: since nobody knows to this day who was behind the Aldo Moro kidnapping, for example, he couldn't honestly give a full explanation, because the most frightening aspect of Italian terrorism lies in the impossibility of understanding who is doing what to whom and why. This may be a valid justification politically, but it is less so dramatically, and perhaps the director has not taken sufficiently into account the simple fact of audience frustration.

I don't want to suggest that there are no bravura scenes in the film: there are, and there is even the obligatory reference to Verdi. Tognazzi sings (out of tune) one of Verdi's few tender father-son arias, 'Di Provenza il Mar' from *Traviata*, with its reference to the pain a son is causing his father. The final sequence is also as 'movie-movie' as anyone could wish. So this is a Bertolucci film, in spite of all the breaks with the past. Bertolucci may be forty now, but I don't think that he really feels forty, or that he is quite at home with his ageing hero. But the important thing is that he has made his first attempt to break out of his own self-created 'system', and has come close enough to succeeding. *Tragedy of a Ridiculous Man* is very much what is usually called a transitional film. R. R.

ON NOW

●ALTERED STATES

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

A lanky scientist (William Hurt), all coltish enthusiasm and unshakeable determination, is consumed by a messianic mission to get to the heart of things. Floating in liquid inside a closed black box, and primed with a South American shaman's brew, he reverses the evolutionary process—much smoke, noise, bending of the lab pipes and blinding lights—becoming first 'primal man' and then 'blob of life'. After initially dragging his feet over the plot, director Ken Russell cranks up the pace of Sidney Aaron's sluggish adaptation of Paddy Chayefsky's novel. He amuses himself with some old effects, and teases the audience by remaining archly unclear as to whether it should be taken seriously or not—the scientist, now Plasticene Man, is ultimately saved by the 'humanity' of his estranged, long-suffering wife, Blair Brown. The whole is a peculiarly unsatisfying salad of yesterday's cinematic fads and a not unexpected sock-'em-on-the-head style. (Bob Balaban, Charles Haid.)

●EXCALIBUR

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

The Arthurian project which, along with *Lord of the Rings*, has much preoccupied John Boorman finally turns up more under the aegis of Tolkien than of Malory. The whimsicality of its magic, and its pop-fantasy of a time when elfish mystery is about to give birth to the world of men, seem to belong most to the fey and now very dated romance of Middle Earth. It is not helped by the fact that it is anchored in a rather music-hall version of Merlin, and a performance by Nicol Williamson in which the comic and mythic gears can be heard loudly clashing. This rather watered-down version of Boorman's metaphysical sense of fun is surrounded by yarn-spinning of a plain and unengaging kind. The film rehearses the Arthurian legend in a plodding yet disconnected way, made the more uninviting by the fact that there is nobody to root for round the Round Table. The quest for the Holy Grail may be timeless, but it shouldn't be quite this anonymous. (Nigel Terry, Helen Mirren, Nicholas Clay.)

●ROUGH TREATMENT

(Artificial Eye)

Wajda's 1978 feature, about a fêted foreign correspondent left by his wife and skewered by his apprehensive masters, was made on the run in what the director has described as 'a blind rage'. It is, nevertheless, a work of notable subtlety: not only in what it avoids saying about the state of

free expression in Poland, but also in the connections it does, clearly, point up between private and public duplicity (script by Wajda, Agnieszka Holland and Krzysztof Zaleski). Even at a period of revolutionary change, Wajda—his country's senior filmmaker, but in many ways her youngest—has the courage to emphasise the unfashionable truth that *nothing* is clear cut: the ease with which the honest are tricked or, despite themselves, become the tricksters. Zbigniew Zapasiewicz, as the journalist, holds the film together with a masterful performance: a man of worried, bruised silences. (Ewa Dalkowska, Andrzej Seweryn, Krystyna Janda.)

●TESS

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Roman Polanski has taken to Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* as if intent on losing himself within it. Even with less prestigious material, Ira Levin's *Rosemary's Baby*, for instance, he has already proved himself a scrupulous adaptor. But his *Tess* emerges without a hint of what might have attracted him to the material, missing even the elements that could have made a Polanski film: the intensified details of a countryside about to be overtaken by the industrial revolution, the ideological rub of the characters against their era. Such details as he has supplied (a copy of Marx on Angel Clare's table) serve to confuse rather than intensify, and fail to bridge the gap of what he has left out of Hardy's characters. The excuse for all the fastidious down-playing of emotions and events is that Polanski has thereby reproduced Hardy. But this is only true in a general picture-postcard sense; in everything else, the film does as little justice to the author as it does to the director. (Nastassia Kinski, Peter Firth, Leigh Lawson.)

THE ANTAGONISTS (CIC)

This boiled-down theatrical version of a seven-hour American TV mini-series about the Roman siege of Masada in the first century AD is flavoured with name players (O'Toole, Quayle, Warner, West, Quilly), but to no avail: a creaking, antique vehicle, unredeemed by a spectacular (virtually unused) location. (Director, Boris Sagal.)

BROTHERS AND SISTERS (BFI)

Produced by the BFI, Richard Woolley's didactic 'whodunit' (a Leeds prostitute is murdered, all Men are guilty) is chiefly marked by the relentless opinion that Woman is the Eternal Victim. (Carolyn Pickles, Sam Dale.)

LA CAGE AUX FOLLES II

(United Artists)

Edouard Molinaro projects his 'birds of a feather' into a jejune espionage plot that even Norman Wisdom might have judged too derivative. Michel Serrault's exotically plumed transvestite at odds with spies, undercover agents and the egregious sexism of the Italian peasantry has his moments. (Ugo Tognazzi, Marcel Bozzuffi.)

CHARIOTS OF FIRE (Fox)

The sheer cheek of casting Lindsay Anderson as a symbol of Establishment ossification is but one sign of confidence in these Sporting Lives, with British Olympians Abrahams and Liddell breasting the box-office tape one pace ahead of nagging contradictions. Class, conscience and 'Jerusalem' on one hand; 'the system', siney slow-motion and Vangelis' score on the other: a

curiously affecting attempt to synthesise British crises both social and cinematic. (Ben Cross, Ian Charleson, Ian Holm, John Gielgud; director, Hugh Hudson.)

CLASH OF THE TITANS

(CIC)

Not so much a clash as a gentle rub, which signally fails to reactivate the enjoyable genre of mythological fantasy. Perseus captures Pegasus, dismembers Medusa and saves lovely Andromeda from the Kraken, yet he's powerless against the unspeakable dialogue, muddy photography and a motley, lacklustre cast. (Harry Hamlin, Judi Bowker, Laurence Olivier, Maggie Smith; director, Desmond Davis.)

COAST TO COAST (CIC)

More beguiling than most attempts to recycle the styles and plots of Hollywood's golden comedies, thanks to the script's affection for its leading characters and the offbeat pairing of Dyan Cannon and Robert Blake, a scorned wife and trucker trundling across the continent with divided goals that slowly merge, *à la It Happened One Night*. (Director, Joseph Sargent.)

THE COMPETITION

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

An agreeable, if undemanding, half-comic Hollywood exposé of the music competition business: pianists Richard Dreyfuss (almost over the hill) and Amy Irving (on the edge of youthful stardom) lovingly quarrel between the eliminating rounds. Written and directed with zest by the competent Joel Oliansky. (Lee Remick.)

THE DISAPPEARANCE

(Cinegate)

Paul Mayersberg's script, from a Derek Marlowe novel, makes an intriguingly Roegish puzzle out of the mysterious disappearance of a professional hit man's wife on the eve of a new assignment. But Stuart Cooper's direction labours over the mosaic, associational style. (Donald Sutherland, Francine Racette.)

THE FAN (CIC)

When the homicidal young admirer of Broadway luminary Lauren Bacall has murdered one of her entourage, he has in a sense murdered them all. Knifing follows knifing with monotonous regularity, and the sole justification for the sketchy theatrical milieu is that, in the current craze for ultra-sanguinary horror, it has never been used before. (James Garner, Maureen Stapleton; director, Edward Bianchi.)

THE FIRST DEADLY SIN

(CIC)

A double mystery: detective Frank Sinatra stalks a motiveless killer while wife Faye Dunaway languishes unto death in hospital. This is mystery without meaning, however, despite a froth of intercutting and religious iconography. Cameos by Martin Gabel and Brenda Vaccaro are the only saving grace. (Director, Brian G. Hutton.)

FORT APACHE THE BRONX

(Rank)

Muggers, murderers, pimps and drug-dealers abound in the 41st Precinct, but Paul Newman's Patrolman Murphy never falters as a tiresomely reassuring presence. Apart from spotlighting his performance, the overly busy narrative lacks any structure and Daniel Petrie never explores the implications of the title. (Edward Asner.)

THE FUNHOUSE (CIC)

Typically crude Tobe Hooper film, repeating the *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* formula by settling a lunatic family into a carnival funhouse and letting the murders rip. Even the seemingly foolproof setting becomes about as atmospheric as an old sock. (Elizabeth Berridge, Cooper Huckabee.)

GREEN ICE (ITC)

Misbegotten romantic comedy-cum-heist movie, set against a background of torture, death and political struggle in South America as our hero (Ryan O'Neal) gets the girl and the

Colombian emeralds. (Omar Sharif, Anne Archer; director, Ernest Day.)

THE HOWLING

(Barber-International)

An engaging mixture of no-nonsense lycanthropy (victims stalked through fog-shrouded woods) and movie brat knowingsness (almost every character named after a B-movie director). Dick Miller steals it as an occult bookshop owner, complaining about the Manson gang's shoplifting and customers fingering the tarot cards. (Director, Joe Dante.)

THE IDOLMAKER

(United Artists)

Nostalgic trip through 50s pop culture, well captured in background detail if not in the updated music. Lifted from the run of the mill by Ray Sharkey's virtuoso performance as the manipulative manager, and by the resemblance of Paul Land and Peter Gallagher to their real-life counterparts Frankie Avalon and Fabian. (Tovah Feldshuh; director, Taylor Hackford.)

MANILA (Cinegate)

Belated release of Filipino director Lino Brocka's 1975 film. Fascinating as a record of Manila's harsh slum life, it is less successful at blending this with the provincial hero's quest for his lost love. A rare, and therefore important, example of this prolific film-maker's work to reach this country. (Rafael Roco Jnr, Hilda Koronel.)

MODEL (Cinegate)

Frederick Wiseman back on home ground, after his increasingly enervating foreign sojourns. *Model* might also seem a little woolly, loosely shuffling together vignettes of high fashion and street life. But the effect is quizzical, even allegorical, rather than didactic: a sly essay on what 'models' and their audience mean to each other.

THE MONSTER CLUB (ITC)

Last gasp, one hopes, for the portmanteau horror movie, which began quite brightly under the Amicus banner long ago. Here, three dismal schlock yarns are tricked out with some even more dismal rock numbers. (Vincent Price, John Carradine; director, Roy Ward Baker.)

NIGHTHAWKS (CIC)

A thriller set up as an exploration into the professional terrorist mentality, but degenerating into yet another tribute to New York's hard-working cops. Helped along by some striking camerawork from James A. Contner. (Sylvester Stallone, Billy Dee Williams; director, Bruce Malmuth.)

ROADIE (United Artists)

Candide-like tale of a young Texan hick caught up in the mad, mad world of rock 'n' roll. Occasionally very funny, mostly very frenzied, undeniably an Alan Rudolph film although his conventional use of the music is a sad disappointment after *Welcome to L.A.* and *Remember My Name*. (Meat Loaf, Kaki Hunter, Art Carney.)

SCANNERS (New Realm)

Another of David Cronenberg's mind-blowing, para-scientific thrillers lives up to its ad campaign as murderous telepaths vie for corporate thought control in an appropriately grotesque psycho-killer scenario of mind over matter. An explicitly Freudian apocalypse arises with micro-chip precision from the sins of the father—Patrick McGoochan in ambiguously cackling form. (Stephen Lack, Jennifer O'Neill.)

VIOLENT STREETS

(United Artists)

A curiously ill-assorted piece on the thief as working man. James Caan mumbles about his need to get on; director Michael Mann treats underworld Chicago as a setting of painterly abstraction; and the plot evolves into something pretentious about the Individual vs the System. Nowhere to go, finally, but a bathetic shoot-out. (Tuesday Weld, James Belushi.)

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